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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
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SERMONS

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS,

VIZ.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.
The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the noblest branch of social virtue.
The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.
Of the image of God in man; or the excellency of human nature.
God not an arbitrary being.
Of the abuses of free-thinking.
Of Mysteries.
Agur's prayer; or the middle condition of life, generally, the most eligible.
The mischiefs of slavish complaisance, and cowardice.
Rules for the profitable reading the Holy Scriptures.
Of Heresy.
Of Schism.
Of the pleasures of a religious life.
Religion founded on reason, and the right of private judgment.
The evidence of a future state, on the principles of reason and revelation, distinctly consider'd.
The nature, folly, and danger of scoffing at religion.

By *JAMES FOSTER.*

The SECOND EDITION.

LONDON,

Printed for J. NOON at the *White Hart* in *Cheapside*, near *Mercers-Chapel.* M.DCC.XXXIII.

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SERMON

SERMON I.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.

Acts xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix *trembled.*——

THERE is nothing more useful and instructive than to acquaint ourselves with the history of mankind, especially in their moral conduct. This gives us a true knowledge of human nature, of the various workings of its passions, and the principles by which it is influenced. And observations grounded on *fact* are certain

SERM. I. and indiſputable; whereas *abſtract ſpeculations* may not only differ very much, but are liable to be diſputed, and more eaſily perplexed or evaded. Beſides, a ſmall piece of hiſtory affords a greater variety of incidents for the improvement of our minds, and the right conduct of life, than can be ſuggeſted, within the ſame compaſs, in the way of *inſtruction* and *reaſoning*. This will more fully appear by conſidering the particular tranſaction between *Paul* and *Felix*, of which the text is a part.

Felix[a], by the confeſſion of *Tacitus* the *Roman* hiſtorian, governed the *Jews* in a very arbitrary manner, and committed the groſſeſt acts of *oppreſſion* and *tyranny*. And *Druſilla* his wife, without any good reaſon to juſtify a divorce, had left her former husband, and given herſelf to him; and conſequently was an *adultereſs*. When St. *Paul*, therefore, was ſent for

Joſeph. Ant. l. xx. c. 5.

[a] Claudius defunctis regibus, Judæam provinciam equitibus Romanis aut libertis permiſit; è quibus Antonius Felix, per omnem ſævitiam ac libidinem, jus regium ſervili ingenio exercuit. *Hiſtor. lib.* v. *c.* 9.

At non frater ejus cognomento *Felix* pari moderatione agebat, jam pridem Judææ impoſitus, & cuncta malefacta ſibi impune ratus, tanta potentia ſubnixo. *Annal.* xii. 54.

to

to explain to them the nature of the Christian Religion, which was then newly published, and, upon that account, a matter of *curiosity*; and in discoursing on the morality of the gospel, which is the most important and essential part of it (as it must be of every revelation that is really of divine original) took occasion to inculcate the eternal laws of justice, and the immutable obligations of temperance and chastity; the conscience of the governour was alarmed and terrified, and a sense of his crime, and dread of the righteous and awful judgment of God upon all such notorious offenders against the rules of *righteousness* and *humanity*, filled him with the utmost confusion. *Drusilla* indeed does not appear to have discovered any remorse; perhaps she was, naturally, of a more hard, insensible, unrelenting temper; or confided in her *Jewish* priviledges, and expected to be saved, as a daughter of *Abraham*, notwithstanding the immorality and wickedness of her life. However this be, as 'tis not my business to make conjectures, I shall proceed to consider what is directly related by the historian, *viz.* that, as

SERM. I.

SERM. I. Paul *reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, Felix *trembled*: only premising, that the impression, which the Apostle's discourse made upon his mind, did not spring from any thing in his *peculiar* circumstances, but from the *general frame* of human nature, and principles that are common to all mankind; and consequently that the moral reflections, naturally arising from it, must be of *universal* concern. And,

1*st*. We learn from this history, that there is, even in the worst of men, a *natural conscience* of good and evil, which in very few, if any, instances, is entirely extinguished. It may be darkened, perverted, and very much defaced, but is hardly ever quite obliterated and lost. There are certain seasons, which check the insolence of the passions, and dispose for gravity and consideration, in which it *revives*; and represents the malignity of irregular and vitious excesses in a clear and strong light.

Indeed the advocates for vice and licentiousness have, some times, gone so so far, as to represent all our notions of right

right and wrong as the effects of *education*, *cuſtom*, *ſuperſtition*, and the like; but this evidently ſhews, that they are men of very little knowledge of human nature; and of narrow obſervation. For let them fix on any inſtance of real and undoubted ſuperſtition they pleaſe, and let them examine all ages, and hiſtories; and they will never find, tho it was ever ſo plauſible, and managed with the utmoſt art and dexterity, that it had ſuch a *ſteady* and *univerſal* influence as notions of morality. The *weak* and *unthinking*, and perſons of a *ſuſpicious gloomy* temper, may be perſuaded to look upon it as ſacred, and drawn into a ſtiff attachment to it; but the more *judicious* have ſecretly deſpiſed it; and it was never known to take, univerſally, as a thing of real excellency and importance in itſelf, with men of all *capacities*, *inclinations* and *intereſts*. SERM. I.

Again, by the uſe of proper arguments, a man may convince great multitudes of the abſurdity and folly of any *eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition*, and form a ſtrong party againſt it; but let him uſe the utmoſt ſophiſtry to confound all

SERM. I. diſtinction between *virtue* and *vice*, to prove that there is no difference between juſt and unjuſt, beneficence and cruelty, that fraud and oppreſſion, adultery and murder, have nothing criminal in them, but what is owing to the *arbitrary* determination of the world, or the juggles of *prieſts* and *politicians*; let him attempt, I ſay, to eſtabliſh ſo monſtrous a ſcheme with ever ſo much craft and ſubtlety, he will make but few proſelytes; nay, nor even be able to impoſe on himſelf ſo far, however he may perplex and puzzle his underſtanding, as to be firmly eſtabliſhed in ſuch a wild opinion, without having, at any time, *uneaſy ſuſpicions*, and ſome mixtures of *jealouſy* and *diſtruſt*.

Add to this, that the *wiſeſt*, in all ages, thoſe who have diſcovered the greateſt ſtrength and compaſs of reaſon, have had the moſt large and refined ſentiments of morality, and urged the ſtricteſt regard to it in all its parts. And finally, that thoſe who differed moſt about external rites, and particular forms of ſuperſtition, have *unanimouſly* agreed in aſſerting the ſacredneſs of moral obligations,

gations, and in all the eſſential and mo- SERM.
mentous branches of virtue. All which, I.
taken together, is the ſtrongeſt preſump-
tion imaginable, that the univerſal ſenſe
of good and evil, which appears among
mankind, is a *natural* principle; and has
not its foundation in *fancy* and *enthu-*
ſiaſm.

But to come more directly to the point. All the obligations of morality approve themſelves, upon examination, to our beſt and pureſt reaſon. And this *ſingle* circumſtance proves, undeniably, that they ſpring from the nature of things; that whereas it holds true of all kinds of ſuperſtition, that they will not ſtand an exact and critical enquiry, are beſt liked when they are leaſt underſtood, moſt ſucceſsfully propagated in times of ignorance and implicit faith, and loſe ground in more judicious and inquiſitive ages; the quite contrary may be ſaid of the rules of virtue, which, the more narrowly they are canvaſſed, their authority appears by ſo much the more unqueſtionable. The mind, the more it conſiders and argues about them, is the

SERM. I. more fully convinced of their importance. Nothing does the cauſe of virtue ſo much ſervice, or makes it appear with ſuch dignity and luſtre, as bringing it to the teſt of *a good underſtanding:* as an evidence of which, it has, in fact, been always moſt cultivated, and held in higheſt eſteem, in the moſt *knowing* and *civilized* nations, where thoſe ingenuous and liberal arts, which adorn and poliſh human life, have flouriſhed in their greateſt perfection.

But even this is not all. For becauſe the deciſions of reaſon are *ſlow*, formed by a train of deductions and inferences, which all are not equally capable of; and if notions of morality were only to be acquired this way, the good effect would too frequently be obſtructed by various cauſes, preventing the right exerciſe of our rational faculties, in ſome by *the cares of Life*, in others by *indolence*; upon theſe accounts, I ſay, there ſeems to be implanted in our nature a kind of *ſenſe* of good and evil, an *immediate perception*, without any intervening train of reaſoning, of the amiableneſs and beauty of

of virtue, and the deformity of vice. And this I take to be what is moſt properly meant by *natural conſcience*; which, however it may be corrupted and obſcured by ſenſual paſſions, and, for a time, controuled by ſtrong prejudices, and inveterate habits of vice, the worſt of men can't entirely get rid of. And, undoubtedly, it is an excellent proviſion of the God of nature, and an undeniable proof of his wiſdom and goodneſs in the formation of mankind; not only as 'tis a conſtant incentive to honourable, virtuous, and uſeful actions, and a more *expeditious*, *univerſal*, and *vigorous* principle than the mere cool and abſtract dictates of reaſon; but as it may always be a means of reforming offenders, and does not leave their recovery *quite deſperate*, tho' they have gone great lengths in vice and diſorder; or, at leaſt, in many caſes, checks the irregular exceſſes of their paſſions, and *limits* their extravagancies, which might, otherwiſe, occaſion greater confuſion in the world, and be much more injurious to the general intereſts of ſocieties.

SERM. I.

SERM. I. I ſhall only add, that as it appears, from the example in the text, that bad men are ſometimes ſtruck with terror on account of their vices, and fully convinced of their unreaſonable nature, and pernicious conſequences, but ſoon wear off the impreſſion, and continue their evil practices without being at all reformed; we learn from hence, how ſtrangely a courſe of habitual wickedneſs *captivates* and *enſlaves* the mind. It is held in ſuch ſtrong fetters, that the ſinner has not reſolution enough to return to the paths of virtue, tho' reaſon and intereſt both demand it; nor to abandon his vices, notwithſtanding he is perſuaded that they are a ſource of reproach and diſhonour, and have a direct tendency to miſery and ruin. Such a ſtate of ſervitude, in which our *nobleſt* faculties, our *intellectual* and *moral* powers, are intirely ſubjected to ſenſe and appetite, is the loweſt and moſt melancholy depravation of human nature; moſt *ignominious* in itſelf, and *fatal* in its effects.

2*dly*. We may obſerve, from the text, what a miſerable thing it is to have a con-

conſcience burthened with guilt, in that a man dares not truſt himſelf *to think*, for fear of being alarmed, and filled with terror and confuſion. *Felix* does not ſeem to have been at all prone to ſuperſtition; or, in general, to have had any troubleſome ſenſe of his crimes. The flatteries of a court, and the amuſements of grandeur and luxury, gave him no time to cool; and diverted all grave and ſerious reflections. But when St. *Paul* began to diſcourſe to him of the immutable obligations of juſtice, againſt which he had been a moſt heinous offender, he immediately ſaw the vileneſs of his conduct, and *trembled* for the conſequences of it.

And the caſe is very much the ſame with ſuch as indulge to any other kind of vicious exceſs. As long as they are amus'd with company, or engag'd in a hurry of buſineſs, or can keep their paſſions enflam'd, and ſilence the voice of reaſon and natural conſcience by a courſe of intemperance, they may continue *ſtupid* and *inſenſible*. But when any thing happens that damps their gaiety, gives a ſhock

SERM. I. ſhock to the mind, and puts them upon thinking, they are ſoon rows'd out of their *lethargy*, and entertain'd with none but *dark* and *gloomy* proſpects. And nothing, ſurely, can be a more perverted ſtate of mankind, than to derive all their relief, all their peace, from the *ſuppreſſion* or *extinction* of reaſon; not to be able to ſtand the deliberate judgment of their own minds, or bear thoſe exerciſes of ſedate and impartial reflection, which are their peculiar glory and happineſs. Beſides, as guilt is ſuch an enemy to *conſideration*, there is this dreadful circumſtance attending it farther to aggravate and enhance its miſery, that it cuts off, in a great meaſure, *the only poſſible means* of the ſinner's recovery.

3*dly*. It is a very natural inference from the text, that inculcating the great duties of morality, and enforcing the practice of them from a regard to the future judgment, is true *goſpel preaching*; and anſwers, in the moſt effectual manner, the excellent deſign of Chriſtianity. Indeed the reaſon of the thing itſelf demonſtrates, that to promote univerſal purity, and

and ſtrengthen the obligations of virtue, which are eternal and immutable, a conformity to the moral perfections of God, and the ſupreme rectitude and happineſs of human nature, muſt be the ultimate view of every divine revelation. Without this, *faith* is no better than *infidelity*, nor *orthodoxy* than *error*; and external rites and ſolemnities of devotion, however dignified by *civil*, or *eccleſiaſtical* authority, or even by a *divine* appointment, if they are conſider'd as having an intrinſic goodneſs, and ſubſtituted in the room of the virtues of a holy life, are ſo far from being parts of *true religion*, that they degenerate into acts of the moſt vile and impious *ſuperſtition*. And therefore if Chriſtianity had, really, ſubverted, in any inſtance, the religion of nature, or depretiated any eſſential branches of morality; nay, indeed, if it had not repreſented them as of the firſt importance to mankind, infinitely preferable to *ſpeculations*, *myſteries*, and alterable *forms* and *modes* of worſhip; notwithſtanding the *pomp* of miracles, it would hardly have prov'd itſelf, to a wiſe and judicious

SERM. I.

SERM. I. ous inquirer, worthy of God, or uſeful to the world.

To PREACH CHRIST is univerſally allowed to be the duty of every Chriſtian miniſter. But what does it mean?—Tis not to uſe his name as a charm, to work up our hearers to a warm pitch of *enthuſiaſm*, without any foundation of reaſon to ſupport it.—— 'Tis not to make his perſon and his offices incomprehenſible.—— 'Tis not to exalt *his* glory, as a kind condeſcending ſaviour, to the diſhonour of the ſupreme and unlimited goodneſs of the *creator*, and *father* of the univerſe; who is repreſented as ſtern and inexorable, expreſſing no indulgence to his guilty creatures, but demanding full and rigorous ſatisfaction for their offences.—'Tis not to encourage *undue* and *preſumptuous* reliances on his merits and interceſſion, to the contempt of virtue and good works. No: But to repreſent him as a *lawgiver* as well as a ſaviour, as *a preacher of righteouſneſs*, as one who hath given us a moſt noble and complete ſyſtem of morals, enforc'd by the moſt ſubſtantial and worthy motives; and to ſhew, that the

the whole ſcheme of our redemption is *a doctrine according to godlineſs.* SERM. I.

That this is *preaching Chriſt* is evident, beyond all reaſonable diſpute, from the text, and the verſe immediately preceding, where we are told, that Felix *ſent for* Paul, *and heard him concerning the faith of Chriſt*; *and as*, i. e. in explaining the faith, or doctrine of Chriſt, *he reaſon'd of righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come*, Felix *trembled.* And this method bears the neareſt conformity to our ſaviour's own example, whoſe whole ſermon on the mount, the longeſt he ever preach'd, is intirely taken up in recommending *moral* duties; and the drift of, almoſt, all his parables is either to inculcate, in general, honeſty and integrity of mind, or urge the practice of particular virtues, or diſcountenance and reſtrain prevailing and deſtructive vices. The ſum of our duty, in the opinion of this divine inſtructer, conſiſts in *the love of God*, and *of our neighbour*; and according to St. *James*, *pure religion and undefil'd, before God, even the Father, is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in*

SERM. I. *their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* So that all those who decry moral virtue, which is the supreme dignity of God himself, and inseparably connected with the happiness of all rational beings, as a thing of no avail towards obtaining the divine favour, and the privileges and rewards of christianity, do, *in effect*, (tho', I am persuaded, with a quite different design, even to exalt, instead of diminishing, the honour of the gospel) subvert the very fundamental principles both of natural and reveal'd religion.

And from what has been said it appears, that to explain and press the eternal laws of morality is not only a truly christian, but, beyond comparison, the most *useful* method of preaching. In this I include enforcing the rules of virtue by all the *peculiar* motives which the christian religion suggests; and making all its doctrines subservient to holiness. There is a passage in St. *Paul*'s epistle to *Titus*, very particular, and strong to this purpose; *this is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly,*

that thoſe who have believ'd in God might be careful to maintain good works; theſe things are good and profitable to men. They are of *invariable* importance; of *univerſal* advantage; and tend to advance the higheſt intereſts of human nature in all ages, nations, and circumſtances; and under every poſſible denomination and form of true religion. To cultivate in the minds of men a ſupreme reverence and love of God, and promote the mutual exerciſe of ſtrict impartial juſtice, generous and extenſive benevolence, meekneſs and condeſcenſion, peaceableneſs and humility, and a ſtrict regard to all the rules of chaſtity and temperance, is to make them moſt amiable in themſelves, uſeful to ſociety, and the favourites of heaven. SERM. I.

But of what advantage is it to ſet faith and reaſon at variance, and lay more ſtreſs on *believing right*, which is a qualification the moſt profligate and abandon'd may attain to (nay even *the devils believe and tremble)* than on purity of heart, and righteouſneſs of life?— Of what advantage is it to magnify the

SERM. I. *grace* of God, by diſparaging and vilifying human nature, which is the *work* of God; by repreſenting mankind as having loſt their noble powers of reaſon and liberty, and, conſequently, being altogether as uncapable of religion as the brute creatures?——What *end* does it anſwer to wrap religion up in *darkneſs*, and lay a great ſtreſs on the *incomprehenſible ſubtleties* of *ſchool-divinity*, but to confound weak underſtandings, make the ignorant conceited and cenſorious, and foment a ſpirit of uncharitableneſs and party zeal?——Where is the *uſe* of inſiſting on abſolute and irreverſible decrees, but to encourage *preſumption*, or drive to *deſpair*?——Or in fixing the whole of our ſalvation on the righteouſneſs of another imputed to us, and giving a deſpicable repreſentation of the moſt exalted human virtues, unleſs it be to mortify the *beſt* of men, and ſlacken their diligence and zeal, and flatter the very *worſt* in their vices?

I may add to what has been already ſaid, that not only the recommending and inculcating, but *reaſoning* about points

points of morality is of ſingular advan- SERM.
tage, and the very beſt way to propa- I.
gate the knowledge and practice of Chriſ-
tianity. Of this we have a plain exam-
ple in the conduct of St. *Paul*, who is
deſcrib'd, in the text, as *reaſoning*, with
*Felix, of righteouſneſs, temperance, and
judgment to come.* And, indeed, the
more of *reaſon* there appears in our re-
ligion, the brighter are the internal cha-
racters of its divine original. Men will
be the more ſtrongly diſpos'd to obey it,
when they are convinc'd that 'tis not
impos'd by a mere *arbitrary* authority,
but is excellent in itſelf, and conducive
to their happineſs. Beſides, by this me-
thod we ſhall repreſent our duty in a
greater variety of lights, to ſtrike every
paſſion, and ſuit it to all tempers and
circumſtances. So that whatever will
not ſtand the teſt of free argument and
inquiry can't be the religion of reaſon-
able beings, nor proceed from a wiſe
and beneficent governour; but is fit
only for a TYRANT to enjoin, and
SLAVES to ſubmit to.

SERM. I.

4. A ſenſe of guilt makes thoſe things the objects of *averſion* and *horror*, which, naturally, yield the higheſt delight and ſatisfaction. We have an inſtance, in the text, of one that was ſhock'd at the ſtrict obligations of *juſtice*, without which there can be no pleaſure, or convenience in human life, and the whole frame of civil ſocieties muſt, immediately, be diſſolv'd. It mortifies the epicure and the adulterer to be told of the rules of *temperance* and *chaſtity*, which are abſolutely neceſſary to the health of our bodies, the rectitude and vigour of our minds, and the grand ſecurity of what is moſt dear and ſacred to us; and the cruel and revengeful to hear of *gentleneſs*, *beneficence*, and the ſoft impreſſions of *humanity*, tho' they form the moſt excellent and amiable character we can poſſibly conceive of. Could we find a being, *originally*, form'd with ſuch apprehenſions of things, we ſhould look upon it with deteſtation, and univerſally abhor the author of ſuch a vile production. But yet our paſſions and prejudices ſo ſtrangely deceive us, that we think more favourably of the purſuits

purſuits of vice, which create many ſuch MONSTERS; who would be glad to prove that the diſtinctions of good and evil were *fantaſtic* and *arbitrary*, and virtue and vice *mere empty names*; and, thereby, deſtroy the order and beauty of the whole moral creation of God. SERM. I.

In like manner, the future judgment of mankind is, in itſelf, far from being an object of *terror*. For that we are moral accountable creatures is owing to our ſuperior capacities, which are the diſtinguiſhing honour and dignity of our nature; and nothing can be a more comfortable reflection to a well diſpos'd mind, than that its integrity will be tried and rewarded by a being of unerring wiſdom, inflexible juſtice, and unlimited goodneſs. But, to a guilty ſinner, this is ſo tremendous a ſcene, that the mere proſpect of it fills him with agony and confuſion. He does not conſider it as *honourable* to human nature, becauſe it threatens his vices; can't think of abiding by the ſentence of *unchangeable rectitude*, and *infinite benevolence* itſelf; and the ſum of his wiſhes is *to die*

SERM. I. *like a brute.* The future judgment is not reveal'd with a view to *alarm* and *confound* the mind, but to reſtrain thoſe irregular practices, which are the ſureſt ground of melancholy ſuſpicions, and inward horror.

Let men, therefore, but abandon their vices, their impiety and injuſtice, revenge and cruelty, ſenſuality and intemperance, and endeavour to reſemble God in purity, righteouſneſs, and beneficence, and then they may always think of him with pleaſure, as the compaſſionate father, the righteous and merciful governor of mankind, who delights in the happineſs of his children and ſubjects: Nay they may even expect, with joy, the time when they ſhall appear before his impartial tribunal, when juſtice will be temper'd with clemency, and all reaſonable allowances made both for particular circumſtances, and for the general weakneſs and frailty of human nature; and when *the judge of all the earth*, who muſt of neceſſity *do right*, ſhall render *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh* upon

Rom. ii. 8, 9, 10.

upon every ſoul of man that doth evil, but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.—God grant that we may all *have confidence, and not be aſham'd before him at his coming.*

SERM. I.

C 4 SER-

SERMON II.

The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the nobleſt improvement of ſocial virtue.

ROM. v. 7.

For ſcarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man ſome would even dare to die.

IN the verſe preceding the text, the apoſtle mentions that great inſtance of the love of God, in ſending his Son into the world to die for us, which is the peculiar diſcovery of the goſpel, and deſerves our higheſt admiration and gratitude; SERM. II.

SERM. II.

tude; *for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.* The goodness of God, in this wonderful constitution, is celebrated, in the new Testament, with the most lofty encomiums. There is an uncommon stress and emphasis laid upon it; *God so lov'd the world*, &c: *and herein is love, that he gave his son to be the propitiation for our sins.* It vastly surpasses the most noble and heroic instances of human benevolence and friendship. For, amongst men, there is scarce one to be met with, that will die for a person who is strictly *just* and *righteous*; and 'tis very rare and extraordinary to find any that will lay down their lives even for a *charitable beneficent* man, *peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die*; *but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the immediate connection of the words, which I shall consider, in what follows, as an independent proposition: and grounding my discourse entirely on the observation St. *Paul* has made, that mankind have a much greater esteem of kind

John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

and

and generous than of merely juſt actions, ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that this is not owing to *education*, *fancy*, and *enthuſiaſm*, but founded on *right reaſon*, and a true judgment of the intrinſic nature and differences of things. In order to this, I ſhall, SERM. II.

I. Give a ſhort ſketch of the characters of the *righteous* and *good* man.
II. Shew the vaſtly ſuperiour excellency of the latter. And
III. Make ſome uſeful obſervations on the whole.

1ſt. I am to give a ſhort ſketch of the characters of the *righteous* and *good* man. There is a general ſenſe in which righteouſneſs and goodneſs have exactly the ſame ſignification, and denote the practice of every thing that is eſſentially right and good. And as, in this large and extenſive view, they both comprehend all moral virtues, goodneſs or benevolence muſt be included in righteouſneſs, as juſtice is included in goodneſs even in its moſt reſtrain'd ſenſe. But, beſides this, the

SERM. II. the words have a more limited meaning. In the Scriptures, and in all other writings, righteouſneſs frequently ſignifies the particular virtue of juſtice; and it would be eaſy to ſhew likewiſe, that goodneſs, in very many paſſages of the New Teſtament, is the ſame with kindneſs, generoſity, and charity. I ſhall mention but two which are indiſputable; *is thine eye evil becauſe I am good?* and again, *be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* And there can be no doubt whether we muſt underſtand St. *Paul* thus, when he ſpeaks, in the text, of the *righteous* and *good* man, becauſe they are diſtinguiſh'd from each other.

Mat. xx. 15. Rom. xii. 21.

But it may be asked, can a man, in any ſenſe, be ſtrictly juſt that is not good?—Are not his good offices *due* to his fellow creatures? I anſwer, that thoſe who are in diſtreſs have, unqueſtionably, a *right* to be reliev'd, founded on reaſon, on common ties of humanity, and the mutual dependence of mankind upon one another. This right, however, is only *general.* It does not, in moſt caſes, give them a claim to aſſiſtance and ſupport from any particular perſons;

perſons; but men are at liberty to chuſe the objects towards whom to exerciſe their charity, as their own judgment and prudence directs, and he that is neglected may have no reaſon to complain of a real injury done him. Whereas juſtice is an *immediate* demand that one man has upon another. 'Tis a demand of ſomething *fix'd* and *certain*, which is not the caſe in acts of charity, the fitneſs of which, with reſpect to particular perſons, and conſequently our claims from them, depend on a variety of circumſtances that can't always be adjuſted, and very often, perhaps, are not proper to be known. So that tho he who has it in his power to do many ſervices for his fellow-creatures, which his circumſtances and ſtation in life plainly direct to, but neglects to perform them, either thro' indolence, or an hard unrelenting inſenſible temper; tho ſuch a one, I ſay, may in a more general ſenſe be ſaid to be *unjuſt*, becauſe he does not that good which the neceſſities of others call for, and which may fairly be expected from him; yet it appears, from what has been ſaid, that SERM. II.

SERM. II. there is ſome ground for the diſtinction made, in the text, between the *righteous* and *good* man, and we ſhall be able the more eaſily to delineate their reſpective characters.

The *juſt* man, then, punctually anſwers all the particular demands that can be made upon him, and renders unto every man what he can exactly and preciſely prove to be his due; not upon a *general* right of claim in which others are equally concern'd, but due *immediately* from himſelf. He is fair and honeſt in his dealings, true to his promiſes, and does no man a direct injury. He will neither defame and blacken his reputation, nor oppreſs him by open violence, nor circumvent and deceive him by ſecret fraud. He will not abuſe the confidence that is repoſed in him, nor take advantage of his neighbour's ignorance to do him a prejudice. And as he is careful to do to others every thing that, in *ſtrict equity*, he is obliged to do, he *rigorouſly* inſiſts on his due from them; and if he can't be charg'd with *downright injuſtice*, imagines this is all that can

can be expected from him, and concerns himself about nothing farther. I have stated the matter thus, because if I should suppose him to recede from his strict right, and make favourable abatements and allowances, it would confound his character with that of the beneficent or generous man, from which, the apostle's argument, in the text, requires it should be kept intirely distinct. SERM. II.

But now the *good* man goes far beyond this. He makes the interest of mankind, in a manner, his own, and has a tender and affectionate concern for their welfare. He can't think himself happy, whatever his possessions and enjoyments are, while he sees others miserable. His wealth and affluence delight him chiefly as the poor and indigent are the better for it; and the greatest charm of prosperity is the opportunity it affords of relieving his fellow creatures, and being more extensively useful. He thinks he has discharged but *the least part* of his duty, when he has done strict justice to all; and therefore the communicating advice and comfort, assistance and support, according to the various

SERM. II. rious exigencies of those with whom he converses, is his constant endeavour, and most pleasing entertainment. In the strong and elegant language of *Job*, he is *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame,* he *delivereth the poor* that cry, *and the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him; the blessing of him that is ready to perish* cometh upon him, and he causeth *the widow's heart to sing for joy.* And that he may practise the more large and generous charity, he retrenches useless pomp and extravagance, and by a regular and prudent management, constantly provides for the relief of the necessitous; esteeming this a much more sublime and noble gratification, than the idle amusements and gallantries of a vain and luxurious age. *A good man,* saith the Psalmist, *sheweth favour and lendeth; he will guide his affairs with discretion.*

Job xxix. 12, 13, 15.

Ps. cxii. 5.

Again, he not only takes all occasions, that present themselves, of doing good, but seeks for opportunities to be useful; 'tis part of the stated employment and business of his life. He contrives and studies which way he may be most serviceable

viceable to his fellow creatures, and what thoſe particular talents are, with which he is intruſted for the good of mankind. If it be *power*, he protects and encourages virtue by his authority and influence, is the patron of liberty, and vindicates the cauſe of oppreſs'd innocence: if *riches*, he is *rich in good works*, *ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate*: if *knowledge*, he counts it his higheſt pleaſure to inſtruct the ignorant, and adminiſter proper direction and comfort in perplexing and difficult circumſtances, and to defend the cauſe of religion, and repreſent it in a juſt and amiable light. And to nothing of this does he want to be *ſollicited*, but his generous heart is always ready, and ſtrongly diſpoſed for beneficent deſigns and actions. You can't lay a greater obligation upon him than by propoſing ways in which he may be uſeful, or enlarge his ſphere of uſefulneſs; for this is the point in which all his views, all his deſires, all his ſatisfaction center. SERM. II. 1 Tim. vi. 18.

Add to this, that he is inclined to abate of his right, when inſiſting too

SERM. II. strictly upon it may have the appearance of harshness and severity; and has such a strong sense of benevolence, such an exalted spirit of humanity and compassion, that no considerations of *private interest*, no difference of *nation* or *religious profession* can restrain; and which the *greatest injuries* cannot bear down and extinguish. He aims that his goodness may be as *diffusive* as possible, and as much like that of the universal parent, the supreme and eternal fountain of good, who supports, enlivens, and recreates the whole creation; and therefore, as he is generous in all his designs, he is very fearful of disobliging any either by word, or action, and endeavours, in the whole of his conduct, to be agreeable as well as useful to all; being candid in his censures, practising to his inferiors the most endearing condescension, and carefully avoiding moroseness, and every thing that has the appearance of insolence and contempt. Finally, that I may conclude the sketch, which I design'd, of this most beautiful and honourable character, the *good* man is unwearied in his endeavours

endeavours to promote the happineſs of others; the ardour of his benevolence is not cool'd tho he meets with ungrateful returns; the trouble and expence of the ſervice don't diſcourage him; nay, he is ready to give up all private conſiderations for the ſake of the publick welfare, and even to ſacrifice *life itſelf* when the good of the world requires it. This ſhall ſuffice for the firſt head; I proceed now, SERM. II.

To ſhew, SECONDLY, the ſuperior excellency of the *good* man's character to that of the *merely righteous*, or juſt man. An attempt of this kind muſt, I am perſuaded, be thought almoſt needleſs, after what has been already ſaid. For the placing the two characters, truly drawn, in the ſame point of view, that they may be fairly conſider'd and compared together, will ſo ſtrongly illuſtrate the beauty of the beneficent character, that the other will be look'd upon as a foil to ſet it off to the greater advantage, and perhaps not be regarded and valued as it ought. And as the mind of man is ſo framed, as immediately to prefer gene-

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rous beneficence to ſtrict and rigid juſtice, there is the more difficulty in enlarging here; becauſe there is ſcarce a medium of proof to be found, that is clearer than the thing itſelf at firſt ſight. The truth appears at once, upon comparing our ideas; and in all caſes which are ſo plain, and, in a manner, ſelf-evident, tis ſufficient to appeal to the reaſon and common ſenſe of mankind; and very difficult to argue in ſuch a way, as not to perplex and darken the ſubject. However, I ſhall ſuggeſt a few things, in which the difference of the characters mentioned in the text will be readily acknowledged. And

1*ſt*. The character of the good man is much more *amiable* in itſelf. Juſtice indeed, ſo far as it goes, is not only an irreproveable character, but rational and becoming; but no man will ſay that it has any thing *great* and *generous* in it, becauſe 'tis, indeed, the leaſt degree of virtue that can be ſuppos'd in ſocial life. —'Tis approv'd of but not admir'd— We don't think ourſelves oblig'd to the perſon that does it, ſince 'tis really, as

little as he can do for us; juſtice being what all have an undoubted right to claim —— And therefore there is properly no *merit* in it, nothing that exalts and *dignifies* a character, becauſe 'tis expected from all who have any notion of good and evil, and are not quite loſt to virtue.

But benevolence, *diſintereſted, generous, diffuſive benevolence*, is the higheſt perfection and glory of human nature. It argues true greatneſs of mind, and is a virtue that men of mean and narrow ſpirits cannot practiſe. —— 'Tis not only a right, but a *beautiful* character, that charms the beholders, and attracts univerſal eſteem and love. —— Even the moſt diſſolute and profligate can't help being ſtruck with it in others, however they may neglect to excel in it themſelves. —— And the fineſt and moſt ſhining qualities, the moſt excellent endowments of nature, and higheſt improvements of art, are *low* and *deſpicable* in compariſon of it, and derive all their *luſtre* from it. Without it, riches are *inſolent* and *arbitrary*; power is *oppreſſive* and *tyrannical*; and wiſdom miſ-

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chievous *craft* and *ſubtilty*, or, at beſt, vain and uſeleſs *oſtentation*. ——I appeal to the reaſon of mankind, whether if any one was to form the moſt lovely and amiable, and at the ſame time the greateſt and moſt heroic character he could poſſibly deviſe, it would not be that of the *generous* and *faithful friend*, the *liberal compaſſionate benefactor*, the *diſintereſted* and *noble-minded patriot*, who diffuſes relief, comfort and happineſs all around him; is enlarg'd beyond mean and ſelfiſh views; and conſiders himſelf, as a member of the grand community of mankind, born for the general good.

Again, the ſuperiour excellence of *goodneſs* to *juſtice* is evident from hence, that the latter is neceſſarily included in the former, as the leſs in the greater; but without benevolence, juſtice, inſtead of being a finiſhed, is a very *defective* character; nay it forms, upon the whole, a bad character, a *little*, *narrow*, *ſelfiſh* character, that is juſtly the object of contempt. This will be more fully illuſtrated by applying it to the ſupreme being, whom if we ſuppoſe to be only juſt,

juſt, and not abſolutely and univerſally benevolent and merciful, we entirely deſtroy the foundation of thoſe exalted, honourable, and lovely conceptions of him, which wiſe and thinking men, in all ages, have entertain'd. But his goodneſs, his unlimited goodneſs, which is ſo glorioufly diſplay'd in the frame of our own nature, in the whole conſtitution of things, and the whole courſe of providence, renders him the worthy object of our truſt and confidence, and of our ſupreme love and delight.

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2*dly*. As the *good* man's character is much more lovely in itſelf, ſo is it more *uſeful* than that of the *merely righteous* or juſt man. By juſtice mens properties are, indeed, in a good meaſure ſecur'd, and injury and violence, and conſequently much confuſion and miſchief in the world, is prevented; but the greateſt part of the true enjoyments of life, of the conveniences and comforts of it, ariſe from *benevolence*. Without juſtice, ſocieties could not ſubſiſt; but without benevolence, if they might poſſibly ſubſiſt (which can hardly be imagin'd) they

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would infallibly be miserable. Mankind are form'd for society, and, by means of their large and extensive capacities, may be exceedingly useful to each other; but if one were to do for another no more than he could *strictly claim*, very little good would actually be done, and thus the design of their social nature must be defeated, and the present being be extremely uncomfortable. For of the man that is only just the utmost that can, generally, be said is, that he is not a mischievous creature; but he may be *insignificant*, a kind of *blank* in the creation: he does no wrong or injury to any; but then he contributes very little to the positive happiness of the world. No: 'tis *generous friendship*, the *tender sympathizing temper*, the *open* and *liberal heart* that make pleasure circulate, and alleviate the cares of life. And did men, universally, study how to be useful, and practise beneficence in its greatest latitude; were their interests consider'd as dependent upon, and inseparably connected with each other, and a constant intercourse of good offices maintain'd among

mong all who are united in the com- SERM.
mon bonds of humanity; the face of II.
things would be alter'd unſpeakably for the better, and the world be as happy, as the imperfection and frailty, and many unavoidable caſualties of the preſent ſtate will admit of. But mere juſtice can't introduce any thing like this deſirable and delightful ſcene; and, conſequently, is vaſtly inferiour, in reſpect of real advantage to mankind, to the exerciſe of benevolence, to which, *partial* and *limited* as it is, the far greateſt part of the happineſs that is in the world is undeniably owing.

3*dly*. The *good* man's character is not only more uſeful than that of the *juſt* man, but its influence is abundantly more *extenſive*. In matters in which *active juſtice* is concern'd, men are, generally, confin'd to a narrow circle. With regard to other, with whom they have no dealings or commerce, they are only *not unjuſt*; i. e. in others words, their actions don't directly affect ſuch, and are of very little importance with reſpect either to their hap-

SERM. II. happineſs or miſery. But perſons of whom we *know nothing*, and with whom we never had *any communication*; perſons who are at the *greateſt diſtance* from us; and whom, whether we conſider their numbers, the different places of their abode, or the variety of their circumſtances, the moſt remote conſequences of our *juſtice* or *injuſtice* can't be ſuppoſed to reach; may feel the kind effects of our generoſity and compaſſion. And as its influence is ſo much wider, and, at the ſame time, the benefits that accrue to the world by it beyond compariſon greater, than can reſult from the mere exerciſe of juſtice, this is a convincing and unanſwerable demonſtration of its ſuperiour excellence. And conſidering the *vaſt uſefulneſs* of this virtue, together with its *intrinſic beauty*, 'tis no wonder that it engages the admiration, the affection, and gratitude of mankind to ſuch a degree, that *for a good man ſome would even dare to die.* There is another thing,

4*thly*. Which I know not whether it be any ground of the apoſtle's obſervation

tion in the text, but yet deſerves to be taken notice of, as it evidently ſhews the ſuperiour excellence of *goodneſs* to *ſtrict juſtice*, and that is, that when a man is juſt, but not benevolent, he can't be ſuppos'd to act from a *right principle.*—— Not in obedience to *the authority of God*, which would determine *univerſally*; and not ſuffer him to neglect one of the moſt important laws he has given to mankind, while he pretends a zeal for another that is of inferiour conſequence.—Nor from a regard to *the fitneſs of the thing itſelf*, becauſe that, likewiſe, would influence, in a ſtronger manner, to the exerciſe of benevolence, which is a much more *exalted* virtue. 'Tis therefore a reaſonable preſumption, that he is juſt only from ſelfiſh views; at leaſt, he can have but very lame and confuſed notions of religion and morality, and muſt proceed upon mean and narrow principles. Whereas, on the contrary, the *good* man, in the utmoſt extent of that character, can't but have the *nobleſt* views, and an uncommon *generoſity* and *greatneſs* of ſoul. He imitates the father of the

SERM. II. the univerſe, acts from the ſame ſublime motives, and in purſuance of the ſame moſt excellent and worthy end. But I can't enlarge upon theſe things, tho they are of the utmoſt importance, and the ſtrongeſt poſſible recommendation of the good and beneficent character.

Give me leave, however, to make one obſervation more before I conclude this head, tho it be of a different kind from the foregoing, and that is, that there is an argument for charity and generous beneficence ſuggeſted in the text, from *private intereſt*; as it tends to procure univerſal love and eſteem, and powerfully engages our fellow creatures to do good offices for us in circumſtances where they are moſt needed, and even with *inconvenience* and *damage* to themſelves. Diſintereſted kindneſs and compaſſion have a natural tendency to ſoften the *hardeſt* hearts, and win upon the moſt *barbarous* and *ſavage* tempers. The moſt *vitious* can't think of offering any inſult to it without the utmoſt reluctance; but, where there is *a ſenſe of virtue*, there will be the higheſt eſteem of it. And tho, perhaps, there

there are very few, who, if matters were driven to that extremity, would really lay down their lives for the moſt obliging and uſeful man, yet he would have many friends who would ardently deſire his welfare, compaſſionate and relieve him in his diſtreſſes, and chearfully contribute to his happineſs. So that *generous benevolence* to mankind is more for our intereſt, in the preſent world, than a *churliſh ſullen* behaviour; and much more than *malice*, *cruelty*, and *revenge*, which render a perſon deſpiſed, or hated by all. Such an one will, in all probability, be ſerved with regret, be *envied* in his proſperity, and *inſulted* in his miſery. I ſhall now conclude with theſe two reflections.

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1*ſt*. We may infer, from what has been ſaid in this diſcourſe, the great wiſdom and goodneſs of God in the frame of human nature; which is ſo formed, as ſtrongly to approve of kind beneficent actions, even when it has no *particular intereſt* in them; and has an *immediate abhorrence* of malice and cruelty. Benevolence (as has been ſhewn) is the chief dignity and glory of mankind, and that virtue on which all the

SERM. II. the advantages and happineſs of ſocial life, in a great meaſure, depend. The all-wiſe creator, therefore, hath graciouſly provided for it in our very make and conſtitution; and not only endued us with reaſon, whereby we are capable of contriving and conſulting for the good of others, but planted in us ſuch ſtrong *inſtincts* and *natural propenſions*, to kindneſs and compaſſion, as can't be over-rul'd and extinguiſh'd without loſing humanity itſelf; and, by this means, has counterballanced the principle of *ſelf-love*, which, were it not for our benevolent affections, would engage us in narrow ſchemes, and little mean purſuits, inconſiſtent with the welfare of ſociety, and the general happineſs of our fellow-creatures.

2*dly*. We learn the excellency of the *chriſtian religion*, which has carried this noble principle to its higheſt pitch, and improv'd it to the utmoſt perfection it is capable of. The whole ſtrain of chriſtianity is love, harmony and peace, condeſcenſion and mutual forbearance, tender mercy and compaſſion. The charity, which it recommends, *ſuffereth long and is kind*,

kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.—— Nay it commands us to be *rich in good works, ready, to diſtribute, willing to communicate*;—— and even *to lay down our lives for the brethren*; *walking in love, as Chriſt alſo hath loved us, and hath given himſelf for us, an offering, and a ſacrifice to God for a ſweet ſmelling ſavour.*——And on this command our ſaviour lays a peculiar ſtreſs, and makes it the very *characteriſtic* of a chriſttian.

SERM. II. 1 Cor. iv. 5, 6, 7. 1 Tim. vi. 18. 1 John iii. 16. Eph. v. 2.

Our holy religion inculcates farther, not only the moſt *diſintereſted* and *generous*, but the moſt *extenſive* benevolence; love to ALL MANKIND, notwithſtanding difference of *nation, religion, intereſt*; love even to our *enemies, not rendring evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwiſe bleſſing.*—— It gives us frequent aſſurances, that this virtue is, in a particular manner pleaſing to God, and will entitle us to a moſt glorious reward.—— It ſets before us an example of it, in our own

Luke iv. 55. Chap. x. 24, &c. Gal. vi. 10. 1 Pet. iii. 9. Mat. xxv. 34, &c. 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

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own nature, in the character of *the author and finisher of our faith, who went about doing good*; and requires that we *look* not only on our *own things, but every man also on the things of others*; and that the same *mind be in* us *which was also in Christ Jesus*; who, tho he was *in the form of God,— made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself*, and, to accomplish our salvation, *became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*——Nay, it proposes to our imitation the example of the supreme creator and father of mankind, whose goodness is unlimited and universal; especially in giving his son to die for us even *whilst we were enemies*; for *if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

Acts x. 38.

Phil. ii. 4, &c.

Luke vi. 36.

1 John iv. 10, 11.

From this short view of the christian doctrine 'tis plain, that it lays down the most exalted scheme of benevolence, supported and enforced by the strongest motives. And, indeed, it has ever been reckon'd one of the chief intrinsic excellencies of

of Chriſtianity, that the goodneſs it recom- SERM.
mends is ſo *pure* and *diſintereſted*, and aims, II.
as much as poſſible, at promoting the *general happineſs*. But yet, upon this very account, has it been reflected on, as if it had paſs'd by, or loſt in a *general*, *looſe* and *undetermin'd* charity, two of the moſt ſublime and noble inſtances of benevolence, *private friendſhip*, and *the love of our country*. I intend, therefore, to take this for the ſubject of my next diſcourſe, wherein I ſhall endeavour to ſhew (beſides the unanſwerable reaſons that there were, from the circumſtances of the world at that time, why theſe things ſhould not be particularly inculcated) that both private friendſhip, and the love of our country, ſo far as they have any thing truly rational and excellent in them, are included in, and muſt be entirely ſubſervient to, the great law of *univerſal benevolence*, which is an infinitely more important and generous principle; that particular friendſhips may be extremely *baſe* and *miſchievous*, and the love of our country ſupporting a faction againſt *the common rights* of mankind; but that, on the contrary, to

SERM. II. be ſteady and inflexible in our endeavours to promote the *univerſal good*, tho we are oblig'd, in order to it, to ſacrifice private friends, nay the intereſts of any ſingle ſociety, how great and flouriſhing ſoever, is *manly*, *noble*, *godlike*.

SER-

SERMON III.

The perfection of the Chriſtian ſcheme of benevolence; in anſwer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendſhip, and the love of our country.

ROM. v. 7.

For ſcarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man ſome would even dare to die.

HAVING, in my laſt diſcourſe, ſhewn the excellency of benevolence, that 'tis vaſtly ſuperiour to juſtice, and the nobleſt virtue in ſocial life; and having

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prov'd the peculiar excellency of the *Chriſtian ſcheme* of benevolence, not only as 'tis moſt diſintereſted and generous, but of univerſal extent and influence, not to be confin'd by any difference of nation, religion, intereſt, nor ſuppreſs'd and extinguiſh'd by perſonal injuries; I proceed now to anſwer an objection that has been made againſt it, by a late *noble*, and juſtly *celebrated* writer, from its not particularly inculcating *private friendſhip*, and the *love of our country*. 'Tis thought very ſtrange, that theſe, which are rank'd among the moſt *heroic* virtues, ſhould be *purely voluntary in a Chriſtian* and *no eſſential parts of his charity* [a]. In order, therefore, to ſet this matter in a juſt light, I ſhall

I. Settle the notion of private friendſhip, and the love of our country, and ſhew how far they are truly virtuous and honourable. And then,

II. Offer a few things, more directly, to vindicate the Chriſtian benevolence againſt the force of this objection.

[a] CHARACTERISTICKS, Vol. I. p. 99.

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I. I am to settle the true notion of private friendship, and the love of our country, and shew how far they are truly virtuous and honourable. 'Tis undeniable, that both these principles have been grosly abus'd. Private friendships have been only little parties in vice and mischief, and public disorder; and an attachment to the interest of particular societies a vile conspiracy against justice, honour, liberty, and the peace and happiness of the world. 'Tis necessary therefore that we settle their proper bounds, that none may be led away, by the mere force of agreeable and bewitching sounds, so as to pervert, what, if rightly understood, are really *amiable* and *useful*, into *monstrous*, *unnatural*, and *hurtful* qualities.

Universal benevolence, then, is the *supreme law* to all rational beings, a law of eternal and immutable obligation, the authority of which ought not to be superseded, limited, or, in the least, weakned by any selfish or partial affections. For if there be any beauty and amiable-

SERM. III. neſs, at all, in doing good, the more extended our views are, it muſt be ſo much the more meritorious and honourable; and, conſequently, to aim at the univerſal good muſt be the higheſt degree of virtue.——Nothing forms ſo great and worthy a character.——'Tis indeed the chief part even of God's moral rectitude;—— and muſt therefore be the ſupreme dignity and perfection of human nature. Again, the happineſs of the whole ſpecies can't be *too intenſely* purſued; whereas all other affections are no longer *innocent* than as they are, at leaſt, conſiſtent with this; are only *virtuous* ſo far as they directly promote it; but are *baſe* and *deteſtable* when they interfere with it.

To apply this to the caſe of *private friendſhip*. When my regard to my friend is inconſiſtent with the love I owe my country, and much more with the general good of mankind, to whom all my ſervices are more immediately and ſtrictly due, 'tis an *unnatural* paſſion, and ought to be rooted out of the mind; becauſe were it univerſally indulg'd

indulg'd, it would introduce the utmoſt confuſion, and an entire ſubverſion of all order and government. No man can ſupport his friend by interrupting the courſe of *juſtice*; or violating the rules of *honour*, who is not an utter ſtranger to virtue; but, on the contrary, muſt think it a *noble* action, agreeable to *reaſon*, *humanity*, and all his *benevolent* and *ſocial* principles, to deſert him for the publick good. And this being the great rule, by which we are to determine, in all caſes, concerning the expediency and fitneſs of private friendſhips, it follows farther, that they have nothing truly generous in them but as they tend to cultivate and improve *univerſal benevolence*, and are a natural means to make the *whole ſpecies* happy.

For if they are not choſen for this reaſon becauſe they are beſt upon the whole, if they are only not contrary to the public happineſs, but have no direct influence to promote it, our views muſt be mean and ſelfiſh; and friendſhip will become a mere matter of *private convenience*, or elſe of *humour* and *fancy*,

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in either of which cases it must be uncertain and variable, as circumstances, opinions, and interests alter; or finally, it will be only *the love of ourselves*, i. e. of the resemblance of our own way of thinking, dispositions and manners in others, and, consequently, nothing like that sublime and heroic virtue for which it has been recommended, and which, indeed, it is in itself, so long as 'tis *the medium of universal benevolence*.

Again, all friendship, in order to its being truly rational and praise-worthy, must be founded in *virtue*. For this is the only ground of that esteem and steady confidence, which are inseparable from a worthy and generous friendship. 'Tis in this way alone that it can be at all useful, or, in any measure, promote the end of every lesser alliance, *viz.* the welfare of the great community of mankind. 'Tis this that distinguishes true friendship from the vile cabals of robbers and traitors, men of dark and mischievous designs, who may have all the other characters of it, such as a similitude of "tempers, passions, interests, secresy, con-

"fidence,

" fidence, constancy, nay, a reciprocal " tenderness and affection for each other." And from hence it follows, that the love of a friend must be proportioned to his real merit, otherwise 'tis foolish and unreasonable *partiality*; and we ought to prefer every man before him, that has, really, a more excellent and useful character. In our *esteem* we must necessarily do it, unless our private affection has blinded and perverted our judgments; and there are some cases supposable, in which, if we would not forfeit the glorious title of being the *friends of mankind* for a little fantastic name of friendship, we must do it in our *services* too. Suffer me to give an instance, in which this is indisputable. Suppose there is an office in the state to be dispos'd of, of vast consequence to the common welfare, that requires, to the right discharge of it, very great and distinguish'd abilities, and that the competition for it lies, intirely, between my most intimate friend, and another with whom I never cultivated any familiar acquaintance, but have only a general knowledge of; if my friend

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friend be unskilful and indolent, and I have reason to believe, from a thorough experience of his temper, that he will behave ill in it, to the detriment of the public; and the other has a much better judgment, more generosity, steadiness, command of his passions, and is qualified, upon all accounts, for greater usefulness;——Can I be long in suspence which to determine for?——Shall I compliment my *friend* at the expence of my *country?* Such friendships as these are so far from being instances of virtue, that they would be justly branded with infamy: and whoever acted thus could have no real benevolence in him, which can never prefer a less good to a greater; nor, consequently, the advantage and pleasure of *an individual*, or the gratifying his selfishness and vanity, to the *general* happiness.

I may add, that there is something, in almost all accounts of private friendship, that is in a great measure *mechanical*. A high esteem of a wise, virtuous, and useful character, an ardent zeal to serve our friends, and faithfulness to their interests,

is

is what all may attain to; but the fervour and ſtrength of paſſion that ſometimes mixes with it, what we may call the *enthuſiaſm* of friendſhip, depends very much upon a particular conſtitution.—'Tis the more groſs part.——And tho' it be highly extolled, and is apt to ſtrike in the relation, and beget the ſtrongeſt prejudices in favour of friendſhip, 'tis rather by engaging our *affections*, than convincing our *judgment*.——What is moſt valuable in it is the deliberate and rational part, which is founded on principles of generous and univerſal benevolence. SERM. III.

And as there is a great deal *mechanical*, there are other things very highly celebrated, which, if they are preſcrib'd as a general rule and law of friendſhip, are *wild* and *romantic*. For inſtance, 'tis magnified as a moſt noble and heroic action for a man to ſacrifice all private intereſt, and even life itſelf, for his friend. I ſhall not diſpute the diſintereſtedneſs and generoſity of it, nor that it may, in ſome caſes, be, upon the whole, very commendable; but there are others, in which,

SERM. III. it will be easy to shew, that it may not only be *rash* and *imprudent*, but inconsistent with *prior* and more *important* obligations.— The circumstances of his *family*, and others whose happiness nearly depend upon him,—his importance to the *society of which he is a member*,—— and usefulness to *the world in general*,— ought all to be consider'd; and may be very strong arguments to prevail with him to preserve himself. And if for the sake of a friend, who, tho possess'd of several amiable qualities, may be of little consequence in active and social life, he deprives his children of a kind protector and guide, and the state of a wise experienc'd counsellor, the chief assertor and guardian of its liberties, and consequently overrules the strongest impulses of *natural affection*, and the regard he owes his *country*, and *mankind*; his friendship is evidently founded on the ruins of *reason* and *humanity*. Let us therefore separate the *mechanical* part, and all *extravagant transports* from private friendship, and consider it as a thing that reason may approve and justify; and we shall find, that 'tis nothing

nothing more than the *reciprocal eſteem* and *affection* of *virtuous* minds, *united* by a harmony of inclinations, views, and intereſts, all *upright* and *generous*; —— That it never exceeds, in any inſtance, the rules of *juſtice*, *truth*, and *honour*; — is always ſubſervient to the great law of *univerſal benevolence*; —— and valuable, not as 'tis an attachment to private perſons, but as a means of promoting the cauſe of virtue, and the happineſs of the world. SERM. III.

The ſame may be ſaid of *the love of our country*, viz. that 'tis a rational and virtuous diſpoſition, not merely as 'tis a regard for a *particular part* of the ſpecies, but as it has a tendency to advance the *univerſal good*. To love our country only becauſe we *were born in it*, without carrying our views to any thing farther, is weak and childiſh; the prejudice of *education* and *cuſtom*. This is making *mere chance* the ground and rule of our affection, and not the dictates of reaſon and virtue. Or are we ſtrongly attach'd to the inhabitants of a particular ſpot only upon this account, our being engag'd

SERM. III. to defend and ſupport each other?—This is debaſing a very noble principle, and making it *mean* and *ſelfiſh*. In order, therefore, to raiſe it to ſo great and heroic a virtue as it has been repreſented, we muſt ſeek out ſome other foundation for it. Now the true ſtate of the matter I take to be this.

For their ſecurity againſt injury and violence, and to anſwer, in the moſt effectual manner, the great end of their benevolent and generous affections, mankind found it neceſſary to form *particular ſocieties*. The reaſon of ſupporting theſe voluntary combinations is not only *ſelf-defence*, but becauſe ſuch a method is for the *general good*. Theſe two ideas ought never to be ſeparated, becauſe things can't continue in a regular and natural ſtate, but while the good of every part is conſider'd as ſubordinate to the good of the whole. Now the good of the whole is unqueſtionably beſt promoted, by every perſon's having a hearty affection for the ſociety to which he belongs, and a ſtrong zeal for its welfare. This is his immediate concern;—the ſtation and ſphere

of

of usefulness that providence has assign'd him.—And to be indifferent about his *country*, nay, indeed, not to cultivate an ardent love of it; but, instead of this, to amuse himself with forming idle schemes for the benefit of *foreign* nations, to whom he is no way related, nor, perhaps, likely to be known, nor, consequently, to have so much influence among them, as to be able to reduce his schemes, were they ever so beneficial, to practice; is very preposterous and extravagant. 'Tis, in effect, resolving to be useless, and neglect the good of mankind altogether. SERM. III.

Since, therefore, a love of the *public*, i. e. of the particular civil community of which we are members, and a generous defence of its laws and liberties, is the only way, that men, in general, have, to contribute their share to the happiness of the species, and, if universally cultivated, a natural means of effecting this noble and most desirable end; we must resolve the merit of it chiefly into this, and enlarge it beyond *narrow*, *contracted* views, if we would make it a sublime and heroic virtue. The undeniable consequence

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quence of which is, that 'tis only a rational principle, when 'tis entirely consistent with, and subservient to the supreme law of universal benevolence.— It ought never to propose *a distinct interest* from that of the whole; for then it immediately ceases to be an amiable and useful quality, and becomes one of the most vile and mischievous. For instance, when it prompts any to extend their territories by unjust conquests, to oppress and plunder weaker states, and spread slavery and destruction thro' the world; in all such cases, when a particular country is *a wicked faction* against the rights of all mankind, which, it would be for the general good, to have suppress'd and extirpated, no one who has any sense of generosity can rejoice in its success. Love of our country is then a *private* affection, and must give way to the *public* one. And tho we may be so far concern'd for its prosperity, as to lament the degeneracy and violence that prevails in it, and even to hazard our lives to remedy its disorders; we can't surely wish well to it any other way, while 'tis carrying on such

ſuch miſchievous ſchemes; we can't re- SERM.
joice in its victories; without declaring III.
ourſelves enemies to juſtice, liberty, and
the univerſal happineſs, and, conſequently,
being monſters of iniquity and cruelty.

It appears upon the whole, that both private friendſhip, and the love of our country are only ſo far amiable and generous, as they are branches of univerſal benevolence. Nothing can be a virtuous, a great or noble, but what is alſo a *uſeful* quality; and 'tis an infallibly right rule of judging in all caſes of benevolence, which may ſeem to claſh and interfere with each other, to aim at the *greateſt* and *moſt extenſive* good. So that, if there be a real neceſſity, I am to ſacrifice my friend for the ſake of my country, and my country for the general happineſs of mankind. Univerſal benevolence, therefore, is infinitely the moſt exalted and heroic ſpring of action, becauſe the univerſal good can't be purſued to *an exceſs*; but private friendſhip and the love of our country may be ſo perverted, as to become miſchievous and deſtructive principles. The former is intirely *diſ-*

SERM. III. *intereſted*, and can proceed only from the love of goodneſs, and, conſequently, is a moſt *godlike* diſpoſition; the latter may both ſpring from *little ſelfiſh* motives, and terminate in a *narrow private* intereſt. The former contains every inſtance of reſtrain'd and partial affection, that has any thing great and lovely in it, and is therefore the *whole ſum* of ſocial virtue; whereas the latter, without more inlarg'd views than the mere pleaſure of a friend, or the welfare of our country, forms a character ſo far from being eminently good, that it wants *the very eſſentials* of true goodneſs. And this, alone, is ſufficient to vindicate our ſaviour's ſcheme of benevolence, and give us a high idea of its *excellency* and *perfection*. I proceed, however, in the

SECOND place, to offer a few things, more directly, in anſwer to the objection that has been made againſt it, from its not recommending, particularly, private friendſhip, and the love of our country. And,

1*ſt*. There is one circumſtance, which has been already hinted, that will go a

great way, of itſelf, to remove this ſeem- SERM.
ing difficulty, *viz.* that the Chriſtian III.
principle of univerſal benevolence in-
cludes both theſe, ſo far as they are
founded in *reaſon*, and have any thing
virtuous and *praiſeworthy* in them. *Uni-*
verſal benevolence muſt, in the very na-
ture of the thing, comprehend every ſpe-
cies of *real* benevolence; and a com-
mand to promote the general good, neceſ-
ſarily implies all the proper means of do-
ing it; and, conſequently, every inſtance
of private friendſhip, and zeal for the
intereſts of particular communities, that
appears to have this natural tendency.

'Tis no juſt objection againſt moral
diſcourſes, that they lay down, chief-
ly, general rules for the right con-
duct of life; for theſe alone are *eternal*
and *unchangeable* morality: and the true
application of them to particular caſes
muſt be left to every man's own reaſon,
becauſe it depends on a variety of cir-
cumſtances, that alter the expediency of
things. To apply this to the point before
us. The great law of benevolence is to
aim at the happineſs of the whole ſpe-

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cies. This is a proper rule for all mankind, and obliges perſons of every complexion and character; but the manner in which it may be done is, to different men, very different, and, conſequently, muſt be refer'd, in a great meaſure, to their own judgment and diſcretion. Nor is this likely to create any confuſion, becauſe general principles are eaſily accommodated to particular circumſtances, where there is an honeſt mind, and the leaſt degree of reflection. For every one that thinks muſt immediately ſee, that nothing can be an act of real benevolence which oppoſes the univerſal good; and will ſoon diſcern in what caſes, private friendſhip and the love of our country are a fit means to advance it.

Let me obſerve farther, tho the *noble* author, whom we are conſidering, ſeems to think it a *ſtrange* ſuppoſition, that private friendſhip is not a matter of *ſtrict* and *indiſpenſable* duty upon all, but, for the moſt part, a *purely voluntary* engagement. General benevolence is a fix'd, immutable, and univerſal duty. An eſteem of good and virtuous characters is always

always rational, becauſe 'tis neceſſarily connected with the love of virtue itſelf. But this is not the notion of friendſhip; which is a "*peculiar relation*, form'd by "a conſent and harmony of minds[a]," as well as founded in virtue; from whence 'tis an undeniable conſequence, that it can't be every man's duty, ſince it evidently depends on circumſtances that are quite out of our power. There are innumerable inſtances, in which perſons may find ſeveral among their acquaintance, and in the ſame ſphere of life, whom they highly eſteem, but not one proper to be choſen for a *cloſe* and *intimate* friend; ſo that the recommending private friendſhip, *in the general*, muſt have been very abſurd, ſince 'tis only a *rare* and *accidental* obligation, and never falls in the way of a great part of mankind. And, beſides, it might have been attended with miſchievous effects. For the bulk of the world, thinking it a duty of religion, and a neceſſary branch of ſublime and heroic virtue, would enter in-

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[a] Characteriſticks, *Vol.* i. *p.* 98. *in the marginal note.*

SERM. III. to *raſh*, *unconcerted*, and *diſagreeable* alliances, which muſt, naturally, produce a great deal of diſorder, and diſturb the peace of ſocieties. Whereas while they act upon the principle of univerſal benevolence, no ill conſequences can enſue; and, therefore, the inculcating this principle only, as an eſſential part of morality, and leaving private friendſhip to fall in as a branch of it, juſt as prudence, on a view of all circumſtances, directs, is the *wiſeſt* and *beſt* way of inſtructing mankind. We may add farther,

2*dly*. To vindicate our Saviour's conduct on this occaſion, that there has been very little need, in any age, to put men upon cultivating particular friendſhips, and the love of their country; but rather to give a check to theſe narrow limited affections, and correct the exorbitancies of them. Mankind have a *natural* inclination to both, and there is no fear of their neglecting either ſo far as 'tis truly generous and uſeful; on the contrary, the only danger is, that they will be carried to ſo great a height, as to be prejudicial to the general good. The experience of our own

own times, and the hiſtory of all ages, is an ample juſtification of the truth of this remark. SERM. III.

Friendſhips have always been frequent enough.——But of what kind are they?—do they not ſpring from *humour* and *caprice*, from a harmony of *odd*, *whimſical*, and *unaccountable* tempers, from *ſingularity* and *ſelfiſhneſs?*—— or are they built upon the ſolid foundations of *honour* and *virtue?* In like manner, zeal for the intereſt of a particular country is it not *univerſal?*——But then is it truly *benevolent* and *publick ſpirited?* Far from it. 'Tis more commonly an abſurd and childiſh prejudice, that makes men ſo extravagantly fond of themſelves, as to treat all other nations with inſolence and contempt. 'Tis a zeal that makes an *idol* of our country, and is ready to ſacrifice even the good of the whole ſpecies to it. There was no reaſon, then, that our Saviour ſhould particularly inculcate theſe things, to which mankind have ſo *natural* a turn, and are ſo apt to indulge *to exceſs*. His great work was to rectify all diſorders, and, in an eſpecial manner, *the abuſe of good principles*, and the extrava-

SERM. III. gancies that arise from it; and this he has effectually done, in the case before us, by enforcing the obligations of universal goodness, which will *regulate* all inferiour affections without *destroying* them. For the observing this rule will lead to every instance both of friendship, and love of our country, that is really *amiable* and *beneficial*, and discourage such only of either kind as are *unmanly*, and *mischievous*. Let me observe,

3*dly*. That there was *a particular reason*, from the circumstances of the world at that time, why the Christian religion should not directly and strongly recommend the love of our country. In general, 'tis not a thing necessary to be insisted on, because 'tis included in the love of mankind, and what all are powerfully inclined to by education, custom, their own particular interest, and the like; but rather expedient that such narrow prejudices should be remov'd, by inculcating more generous and extensive views. And 'twas much less to be expected at a juncture, when an affection for particular countries was *a general nusance*, and triumph'd

umph'd over juſtice and humanity. For SERM. 'tis well known, that the *Jews* were ſo partially fond of their own nation, that they look'd upon themſelves as the only favourites of heaven; which made them ſevere and rigid in their cenſures, and moroſe and unſociable to all who were not of their religion. And, undoubtedly, the notion that ſeems, generally, to have prevail'd among them, that the *Meſſiah* was to be their temporal prince, and extend his dominion over all the earth, would have put them on ſubduing and oppreſſing other countries, as ſoon as they imagin'd they had a favourable opportunity for it. They wanted nothing but the power to effect this vile and barbarous deſign, which their *ſelfiſhneſs* and *pride* ſuggeſted.—And as for the *Romans*, whoſe noble lectures of benevolence and generoſity are ſo much boaſted of, and their love of their country repreſented as the very perfection of heroic virtue; the *Romans*, I ſay, were the *plagues* and *ſcourges* of mankind, and had actually carried their arms and conqueſts, and, together with them, terror, ſlavery, and ruin,

III.

SERM. III. ruin, thro' the greateſt part of the then known world.

—Was this now a time to recommend narrow views, and an attachment to particular ſocieties, when the *general intereſt* had ſuffered ſo much by it?—It was rather the way to have deſtroy'd *publick benevolence* altogether. The proper leſſon to be inculcated, in ſuch a confus'd and degenerate ſtate of things, was certainly *univerſal goodneſs*, in order to put a ſtop to the progreſs of ambition, avarice and luxury, which had introduc'd ſuch dreadful deſolation, and ſubverted liberty, juſtice, and all ſocial virtues. This was the only remedy that could be applied to the prevailing diſorder. So that our Saviour's ſcheme of benevolence is not only, in itſelf, the *nobleſt* and moſt *godlike* that we can conceive of; but in keeping to fundamental and general principles, and not deſcending to leſſer conſiderations, he acted the part of a *wiſe reformer*;—a friend to the *univerſal happineſs*;—and an enemy *to oppreſſion* and *tyranny*. Suffer me to add

In

In the laſt place, that tho' the Chriſ- SERM.
tian religion has not particularly enjoin'd III.
private friendſhip, and the love of our country, becauſe, ſo far as they have any thing virtuous and commendable in them, they fall in neceſſarily with the regular purſuit of the general good; and becauſe 'twas needleſs in itſelf, this being the conſtant bent of human nature; and finally, becauſe 'tis always more proper to reſtrain the exceſſes of theſe principles, than to allow them ſcope and latitude; and was ſo *particularly* at the time of our Saviour's appearance; tho', I ſay, for theſe very ſufficient and weighty reaſons, they are not directly enjoin'd in the Chriſtian religion, yet 'tis *a falſe inſinuation*, that it has given no encouragement to them. For we have, in the character of Chriſt himſelf, an eminent example of each of theſe virtues, which is equally binding, as an expreſs law, upon all who acknowledge his authority. He choſe but twelve perſons to be his immediate and conſtant followers, and one of them he made his *friend*. Accordingly we read, in the hiſtory of the New Teſtament, of *the diſciple*

SERM. III. *ciple whom Jesus loved*; whom he always treated with confidence, and particular marks of tenderness and affection.—— Here was a friendship that sprang from *virtue*; from a consent and harmony of the most *benevolent*, *mild*, and *amiable* dispositions; it was intirely *rational*, *disinterested*, *generous* and *faithful*; subservient to the *universal good*, being founded in the love of goodness itself; and consequently a perfect pattern for our imitation.

Joh. xix. 20.

And was not his weeping over *Jerusalem*, from a sense of its impending ruin, a noble proof of his ardent concern for the *public welfare?* were not all his labours to make his people happy, by reforming their corruptions and vices? was it not for this that he suffer'd so many abuses?——nay, did he not *even die* for the good of his country? I may add to this the example of St. *Paul*, who was so transported by his affection for his countrymen, as to wish that the greatest of evils might befal himself, even to be *accurs'd from Christ*, if, by that means, he might be the instrument of preserving

Luke xix. 41.

Rom. ix. 3.

ſerving and eſtabliſhing their proſperity. These are inſtances, than which, if we take in all circumſtances, none ever were, or can be, more great and heroical; and had they been found among the old *Greeks*, or *Romans*, they would have been celebrated with the moſt labour'd and magnificent encomiums. But when men ſet themſelves to magnify the powers of reaſon, and run down revelation, every thing, in the latter, has a *low* and *invidious* turn given to it; the moſt godlike virtues loſe their luſtre; and the moſt exalted ſcheme of morality is debas'd and vilified; as in the caſe we have been conſidering, Chriſtianity is repreſented as being defective for what is its chief excellency, and renders it vaſtly preferable to any ſyſtem of moral philoſophy, or any inſtitution of religion, that ever appear'd in the world.

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Let us then be perſuaded to cultivate, to the utmoſt, diſintereſted and univerſal benevolence; for what is the perfection of our religion muſt alſo be the rectitude and honour of our nature.——Let our conſtant aim be the good

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good of mankind.——Let us enlarge our minds, daily, from little narrow prejudices, that all our private pleasures, our friendships, our regards to our country, may be regulated with a view to this as their ultimate end.——Nay, if it were possible, we should extend our thoughts beyond our own species, and take in *the whole universe of rational beings.* For the more unbounded scope we give to our generous benevolence and compassion, the more truly noble it is; and the more nearly do we resemble the supreme fountain of goodness, whose *tender mercies are over all his works.*

SERMON

SERMON IV.

Of the image of God in man; or the excellency of human nature.

GEN. i. ver. 7. the former part.

So God created man in his own Image, in the Image of God created he him.

THERE is no part of knowledge more considerable than right knowledge of human nature. It is of the utmost importance towards the regular conduct of life; and all the errors of mankind in point of morality, *i. e.* the most fatal errors that reasonable creatures can be guilty of, are certainly owing to their not

SERM. IV. not underſtanding, or not ſeriouſly conſidering, their own frame and conſtitution. And yet it may well be wonder'd at, that men ſhould be ſuch great ſtrangers to the deſign of *their own* nature, and of all the objects of knowledge know the leaſt of *themſelves*; of *themſelves*, I ſay, whom they are fond of even to exceſs, and whoſe welfare they neceſſarily deſire, but while they continue in this ſtate of ignorance cannot purſue. For unleſs we examine into our own make, and conſider the powers and capacities wherewith we are endued, and the ends which the great Author of our being deſign'd us for, 'tis impoſſible we ſhould underſtand our *duty*, or our *happineſs*.

Indeed, human nature has been repreſented in ſo *baſe*, *diſagreeable*, and *monſtrous* a form, that the contemplation of it muſt needs be frightful and ſhocking to a generous mind; as having loſt its noble powers of reaſon and liberty, and being the ſeat of nothing but irregular, impure, and miſchievous paſſions; as incapable of any thing that is good and virtuous,

tuous, and prone to all manner of vice and wickedneſs. —— And if this were true, who could take any ſatisfaction in looking into himſelf, when he muſt behold ſuch a *hideous picture of deformity?* —— But, thanks be to God, the honour of our nature may be eaſily vindicated from ſuch unjuſt reproaches, as will, I hope, evidently appear from the enſuing diſcourſe; and, beſides, ſuch an account of it is, in its direct conſequences, of the utmoſt prejudice to the intereſts of religion and morality. For as, on the one hand, a right ſenſe of the dignity of human nature inſpires great deſigns, leads to the moſt beneficent, generous, and Godlike actions, and is a ſtrong preſervative from every thing that is vile and diſhonourable; ſo, on the other, when it is deſcribed as having nothing excellent or amiable in it, and as a complication of *mean-ſpiritedneſs*, *ill-nature*, *ignorance*, and *vice*; and when, upon this foundation, injuſtice, cruelty, ingratitude, pride, revenge, and the worſt of villanies are repreſented as *natural* to mankind; this has a manifeſt tendency to encourage their

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I. Show, wherein the image of the Deity, in man, consists; and that not only the *first parents* of the human race, but *all mankind since*, notwithstanding the corrupt and degenerate state of the world, were originally formed after the image of God. And,

II. Conclude with some proper and useful inferences.

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I. I am to ſhow wherein the image of the Deity, in man, conſiſts; and that not only the *firſt parents* of the human race, but *all mankind ſince*, notwithſtanding the corrupt and degenerate ſtate of the world, were originally formed after the image of God. Some commentators have imagined, that by the image of God, in which he created our firſt parents, is meant a *viſible ſplendor*, a *glory* that conſtantly attended them, and reſembled, in ſome degree, the *Shechinah*, which was the glorious Symbol of the divine preſence. But this is matter of mere conjecture, and of very little conſequence in itſelf. I ſhall therefore inſiſt no longer upon it, but proceed to mention ſome things that are more plain and certain, and of general and evident importance.

Man is a being partly *ſenſitive*, and partly *rational*. There can be no reſemblance of his great Creator in the ſenſitive part of his frame, becauſe HE is a pure and infinite ſpirit. And therefore when bodily parts, and ſuch paſſions as frail men experience, are attributed to

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the great God in Scripture, we muſt underſtand ſuch deſcriptions as uſed in condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, and narrow imperfect conceptions of things; and interpret them in ſuch a manner, as will make them conſiſtent with plain paſſages that aſſert the *ſpirituality* of the divine nature, and with the reaſon and nature of things. It remains then, that man can bear the image of the Deity only in his intelligent nature. And,

1*ſt*. He reſembles his Creator in his *reaſon*, and *underſtanding*; whereby he is capable of making very conſiderable improvements in knowledge, and of diſcovering all thoſe truths which are neceſſary to the right management of his conduct, and to ſecure his perfection and happineſs: in that he is not impelled and determined by mere inſtinct, but is capable of conſidering and examining the nature and conſequences of things, and of making a deliberate and wiſe choice. And this, very probably, is one of the principal things intended in the text. For God, having finiſhed the inanimate and animal creation, is deſcrib'd as proceeding

ceeding to the making a being in his own *image*, *after his likeneſs*, i. e. a *reaſonable* creature, who muſt, conſequently, reſemble him the *ſupreme* and moſt *perfect reaſon*; and the great priviledge deſigned to be conferred upon this being was a dominion over the inferior creatures, in order to which reaſon was abſolutely neceſſary. And becauſe reaſon is the moſt eminent diſtinction and glory of the human nature, by which man, as Lord of the lower world, is highly advanced above the other beings that inhabit it, 'tis not unlikely, that the hiſtorian repreſents the Deity as proceeding to this part of his creation with *peculiar ceremony*, to do honour thereby to this excellent nature, and give us a becoming ſenſe of its importance and dignity. But,

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Gen. i. 26.

2dly. The image of God, in man, has a reſpect, farther, to the *moral rectitude* in which he was created; his paſſions being in a regular ſtate, and ſubject to the government of reaſon, which was capable of keeping them within their proper bounds, that they might not, at any

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time, be extravagant and disorderly; and which directed to the practice of all the duties of piety, to justice and benevolence, and to the moderating the animal affections and appetites, as fit and necessary and suitable to the state and condition of human nature; and particularly to the exercise of the most universal and generous benevolence and compassion, to which he was excited, besides, by such strong instincts, that 'twas impossible for him to be entirely destitute of this virtue, which is one of the brightest characters of the Deity, without losing humanity itself. And in consequence of his understanding, the great compass of his rational powers, his moral rectitude, and particularly, the kind and benevolent affections of his nature, (in which consisted his more immediate resemblance of his maker) he was appointed to exercise dominion over the inferiour creatures; and so to be the *representative* of the great author and governour of nature in this lower world, and dispense his authority. I have given this short and general account of the image

of God in man, that I might have time to demonſtrate, what is of the greateſt importance, and the only thing that can make a diſcourſe on this ſubject uſeful to us, *viz.* That, in all theſe reſpects, not only the *firſt parents* of mankind, but their *deſcendants*, were originally formed after the divine image. And, SERM. IV.

1*ſt.* None will deny that mankind are *reaſonable* creatures, how much ſoever they may be inclined to diminiſh the *excellency*, and weaken the *force* of human reaſon. And, I think, it can, with as little juſtice, be denied, that the reaſon of mankind is able, in all important inſtances, to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, good and evil; and that their intellectual faculties are of very *large extent*, formed for making great and wonderful diſcoveries, and capable of being, for ever, enlarged and improved; ſo that, as reaſonable creatures, they ſtill evidently retain the image of God. And this, I believe, will be eaſily allowed, and the only queſtion will be, whether mankind, in their *original formation*, before

SERM. IV. they are perverted and corrupted by prejudices of education and cuſtom, the influence of evil examples, and vitious habits wilfully contracted, ſtill retain the image of God with reſpect to *moral rectitude.*

Now that this is really the caſe appears from hence, that they have underſtanding to direct the impulſes and affections of the animal nature, to conſider when they are to be indulged, and when reſtrained, to form juſt notions of happineſs, and regulate the deſire of preſent ſenſitive pleaſure, that it may not interfere with the rectitude of their higher powers, and the exerciſe of benevolence towards their fellow-creatures; that, having a principle of reaſon and liberty, they muſt be capable of knowing, loving, and ſerving God their Creator, and ſupreme governor, and of the pleaſures of mutual benevolence and friendſhip, as well as of governing their animal paſſions, by keeping them within due bounds, and controuling them when they grow licentious and extravagant; and that this is the *direct tendency* of human nature, even

even in its preſent ſtate. For human nature, even in its preſent conſtitution, is a reaſonable nature, and the reaſonable nature of man has no *evil* tendency, but directs to the purſuit of wiſdom and virtue, and to ſuppreſs all corrupt deſires. SERM. IV.

For inſtance, is it not *agreeable to human nature* to reverence the great author and governour of the world, and ſecure his protection and favour, on whom we abſolutely depend, by an imitation of his perfections, and obedience to his commands? Does not *nature* teach us to be juſt and charitable, to compaſſionate the miſerable, and relieve the diſtreſs'd? are not theſe virtues ſuitable to our *ſtrongeſt affections* and *inſtincts?* and the contrary vices, by the univerſal conſent of mankind, branded as *inhuman* and *monſtrous?* Again is it not *natural* to us to ſeek and endeavour to promote our own happineſs, and, conſequently, to mortify all thoſe evil appetites, which are the ſources of corruption and miſery? Or does our *nature* direct us to rebel againſt the author of our being, to prey upon our own kind, to delight in oppreſſion and injuſtice, and in the miſery of our fellow creatures, and to be agita-

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SERM. IV. ted by wild and extravagant desires which sink us even below the condition of brutes? Mankind may, indeed, degenerate into this miserable state, but, still, all must allow that this is not *human nature*, but a most dreadful *depravation* of it; for our reasonable nature teaches us to abhor these things. So that, according to *Solomon*'s observation, in all ages of the world, *God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* For the *original integrity* of human nature does not consist in having no temptations to vice, but in being able to subdue and conquer such temptations: which it must be capable of doing as it has reason to direct it to what is right and fit to be done, and a power of choosing freely, and consequently of acting according to its right judgment of things.

Eccles. vii. 29.

It must, after all, be confess'd, that there is a *sickness* and *disorder*, in our mortal frame, introduced by the fall, which, considering the closeness and intimacy of their union, may be supposed, in some measure, to affect the mind. It may be a clog upon our reasoning powers, and

and ſtrengthen the animal paſſions. But this is entirely a *natural*, and not a *moral* defect; which can't ariſe, in any inſtance, from bodily conſtitution, but only from a perverſeneſs and depravity of the will. And ſuch natural diſorders are only, like external objects and circumſtances, *occaſions* of, and *temptations* to vice, and conſequently of no weight againſt any part of the preceding argument. SERM. IV.

The grand foundation of mens error, in judging of theſe things, has been this, either that they have taken their eſtimate of human nature from the *ſenſitive* and *brutal* part of it, and not from the *intelligent* and *moral*, and repreſented to their minds, as the *original* ſtate of it, ſuch evil diſpoſitions and habits as are of their own creating; or elſe, that they have underſtood particular paſſages of ſcripture, which give the character of the moſt profligate and abandoned ſinners, as deſcribing the *natural* temper of all mankind; and ſtrained ſtrong *figurative* expreſſions, which are very frequent in the eaſtern languages, to their higheſt

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ſenſe, contrary to the general deſign of the revelation, as well as the plain reaſon of things. And, indeed, if perſons will proceed in ſuch an *undiſtinguiſhing* way, 'tis no wonder they bring themſelves to believe any thing, however abſurd and, in itſelf, incredible. Let me only add, that as it is a plain and obvious truth, how much ſoever mens partial views of things, and miſapprehenſion of ſome doubtful paſſages of ſcripture may confound and darken it, that human nature, even in its preſent ſtate, is a reaſonable nature, and that to ſuch a nature as this vice and wickedneſs, of all kinds, is neceſſarily repugnant: beſides, I ſay, that this is an obvious truth, ſuch a ſenſe of things, which is ſo much the honour of human nature, and of the great God, who formed it to reſemble his own perfections, muſt yield abundant ſatisfaction to every pious and every generous mind.

I ſhall but juſt mention, that man continues ſtill to bear the image of God, in reſpect of his dominion over the inferior creatures. The *inanimate*, *vegetable*, and *animal* world are uſeful to him various

ways; ſome by their labour; others for food and clothing; and not only adminiſter to his neceſſities, but contribute, jointly, to the convenience and ornament of life. And it may be queſtioned, whether it would be poſſible for him, in ſome inſtances, to exerciſe his dominion in the manner he now does, were it not for a kind of *inſtinct* planted in the nature of animals, to acknowledge him as their ſuperior Lord. But I diſmiſs this head, and proceed

II. To make ſome uſeful inferences from what has been ſaid. And,

1*ſt*. Let us be thankful to God for having ſo diſtinguiſhed and *honoured* our nature, as to form it after his own image. Our *rational* and *moral* powers, by which we reſemble the Deity, are the chief excellency and advantage of our nature. By theſe we are eminently advanced above the brute creatures, rendred capable of the pleaſures of ſociety and friendſhip, and of improvements in knowledge and virtue. 'Tis by means of theſe powers, that

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that we *alone*, of the whole visible world, are fitted to contemplate the great author of the universe, and celebrate the glory of his perfections. Are we not then under the strongest ties of gratitude, by our united praises, to excite, in one anothers minds, a warm and affectionate sense of his goodness, and a generous ambition of imitating his most excellent character? Shall we omit a duty, for which we are so *peculiarly* formed, and the obligation to which arises, immediately, from our very make and constitution? And as the noble faculties, with which he has adorned our minds, qualify us for paying him a *voluntary* homage and obedience, shall we not testify our sense of this high favour by the most entire and chearful resignation, and devotedness to his service?

All the laws, by which he governs us, are the result of most perfect wisdom and goodness, and calculated to promote our supreme perfection and felicity; and therefore piety, justice, charity and temperance, or the regulating our affections and desires, are essentially our duty by the very frame of our nature. And if we

are

are wilfully deficient in any one branch of it, if we are thoughtleſs and inconſiderate, and negligent of our actions, we are unworthy the name of *reaſonable* creatures, and highly affront the wiſe and bountiful author of our beings, who hath beſtowed that excellent character upon us. SERM. IV.

2dly. Let us maintain a juſt ſenſe of the *worth* and *dignity* of our nature, as we have the *honour* to be formed after the image of God. I mean, that we ſhould value it in ſuch a degree, as is neceſſary to enable us to ſupport our character, and inſpire ſentiments of generoſity and virtue. 'Tis a *laudable* greatneſs of mind to preſerve ſuch an opinion of the excellency of our nature, as ſhall reſtrain from baſe and diſgraceful actions. And no thought will more effectually anſwer this end, than that of our being made in the likeneſs of the greateſt and beſt of beings. Shall ſuch a one diſhonour himſelf ſo far, as to relinquiſh the noble entertainments of the mind, which are peculiar to rational beings, for thoſe groſs and ſenſual gratifications,

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tions, which he enjoys in common with inferiour and irrational creatures? and thereby, from being exalted to a reſemblance of the Deity, ſink into the condition of a *mere animal?* An ingenuous ſpirit would reject all temptations of this kind with *ſcorn* and *indignation.*

Or ſhall I conſent to become *viler* than a brute, by rooting out of my nature the principles of benevolence and compaſſion, which are the moſt lovely and adorable perfections of the ſupreme being, and making myſelf a *monſter* of cruelty and revenge?

When reaſon, which, by the ſkilful hand that formed us, was placed in the ſeat of government, is ſubjected to blind and headſtrong appetites, and we are the *ſlaves* and the *ſport* of paſſion; when we are aſhamed of a wiſe and regular conduct, and ſteady adherence to the rules of religion, or afraid of the conſequences, and ſacrifice our virtue to worldly honour and advantage; when our intelligent and active powers, which are fitted for ſuch noble purpoſes, and high employments, are loſt in *indolence* and *ſloth*; when inſtead

ſtead of being uſeful to others, and cul- SERM. tivating, in our minds, habits of juſtice, IV. and univerſal charity, we practiſe oppreſſion, fraud, and injury; alas! how wofully is that excellent nature *debaſed*, which was formed for ſuch high advancement, and even for godlike perfection? Where is, then, the *amiable image* of the Deity, our chief ornament and glory! Nay, I may ask, where is *humanity* itſelf! For 'tis reaſon alone that makes men of us, and is the moſt diſtinguiſhing part we bear of the divine image; and therefore *as men*, and creatures reſembling the great author of our beings, we ought to have a juſt and conſtant ſenſe of the dignity of our reaſonable nature, that we may never be tempted to do any thing unworthy of it.

3*dly*. The notion, that man was made after the image of God, teaches us to love, reſpect, and honour our fellow creatures, as well as to ſet a juſt value on ourſelves. For the affection and reſpect being due to *human nature*, or rather to the degrees of *reaſon* and *moral perfection*,

SERM. IV. its reſemblance of the Deity, which appear in it, is equally due to it in my neighbour, as in my own perſon; and can't be withheld without doing injuſtice, and ſhewing contempt both to the *image*, and *original*. Cruelty, even to brute creatures, is a certain ſign of a very baſe and degenerate mind; but it muſt be attended with peculiar aggravations, when 'tis exerciſed towards ſuch as bear a reſemblance of our maker. And therefore 'tis very remarkable, that when God appointed, by an expreſs command, that murderers ſhould be puniſhed with death, this reaſon is aſſigned for it, *for in the image of God made he man.*

Gen. vii. 6.

Upon the ſame account every lower injury muſt be criminal in proportion; and the contrary duties of benevolence and mercy neceſſary and indiſpenſable. And, doubtleſs, 'tis for this reaſon, among others, that the love of God and of our neighbour are repreſented, in ſcripture, as having an inſeparable connection with each other; which, indeed, is very evident, even from the nature of the thing. And ſince ALL mankind are made after

ter the likeneſs of God, our good will to them muſt be *univerſal*. For we act a very contradictory and inconſiſtent part, if we profeſs a reverence and eſteem of the God of *human nature*, the father of *the ſpirits of all fleſh*, and pretend to celebrate the glory of his *univerſal* goodneſs; and, at the ſame time, confine our good offices to a particular *family*, *nation*, or *religious profeſſion*; and are hard hearted to all the reſt, who, equally, bear the impreſſion of his excellent and divine image. SERM. IV.

Again, as we believe that we were made in the image of God, and to act in imitation of his example, 'tis our duty to exerciſe our dominion over brute animals with *lenity*, *moderation*, and *mercy*. For by unneceſſary ſeverities and cruelties towards them, we manifeſt a barbarous and ſavage temper of mind, and conſequently that we have loſt thoſe ſentiments of goodneſs and pity, which are our moſt glorious reſemblance of the great Creator; and act contrary to thoſe excellent rules, which he himſelf adheres to in the government of the uni-

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verſe. And I can't help obſerving upon this occaſion, that our treatment of brute creatures, who, in reſpect of their many ſervices to mankind, as well as from the regard due to our *common Creator*, have a claim to much better uſage from us, muſt be matter of great uneaſineſs to perſons of a benevolent and generous diſpoſition; not only upon the account of the miſery which they endure; but becauſe the barbarous inſtruments of their miſery are ſo far from having that merciful temper, which the Chriſtian religion recommends, that they ſeem, almoſt, to have forgot common humanity.

4*thly*. Since no part of the image of God appears in the conſtitution of our bodies, and the animal frame, but all in the intelligent nature; let us not value ourſelves chiefly upon health, ſtrength, beauty, or any other enjoyments that are external to the mind, but upon cultivating our rational powers, and our moral perfection; or, in the language of ſcripture, being *created, after the image of God,*

God, in righteouſneſs and true holi- SERM.
neſs. IV.

Finally, we learn, from what has been ſaid, to value the Chriſtian religion, the chief view of which is to purify and exalt human reaſon, obſcur'd and debas'd by ſuperſtition and vice, and reſtore the *original rectitude* of our nature. This great deſign it is very wiſely adapted to promote. For the laws of this excellent revelation have a neceſſary tendency to the ſupreme perfection and happineſs of reaſonable beings; and it enforces the obſervation of them, in which conſiſts our neareſt and moſt honourable conformity to the nature of God, by the moſt important and encouraging motives. By the goſpel, *the wrath of God is reveal'd* Rom. i. 18. *from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs.* Therein, likewiſe, *are given unto us exceeding great and* 2 Pet. i. 4. *precious promiſes, that by theſe we might be partakers of a divine nature*; particularly the promiſe of a glorious reſurrection to eternal life, when the faculties of the mind will be *enlarged*, and its pleaſures

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more *pure* and *ſubſtantial*; and when even this corruptible and animal frame will be raiſed *a ſpiritual body*, and put on *incorruption* and *immortality*; and, conſequently, inſtead of being a clog upon the rational nature, be aſſiſting to it in its moſt *refined* operations. Then it will be ſeen, in a much more glorious manner than it ever has been in this world, or than it could have been if mankind had retained their primitive innocency, that *God made man in his own image*. Then the human nature will appear in its fulleſt *luſtre* and *dignity*.

I can't conclude without obſerving, that even the *poſitive* inſtitutions of Chriſtianity are calculated to advance the ſame bleſſed deſign, namely to reſtore and perfect the image of the Deity in us; as, by their tendency to eſtabliſh and confirm good diſpoſitions, they aſſiſt and promote the purſuit of *real* and *Godlike* virtue. Let us be perſuaded therefore, in the uſe of thoſe means which our holy religion preſcribes, to get as great a reſemblance of our maker, in his *moral* character, as is poſſible;

that we may hereafter be admitted into the regions of light and immortality, where we ſhall be more compleatly *like him*, becauſe we ſhall *ſee him as he is*, and improve in this likeneſs, and, conſequently, in honour and felicity for ever.

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SERMON V.

GOD not an arbitrary being.

ROM. ix. 20.

Nay, but, O man, who art thou that replieſt againſt God?——

THO' religion be in itſelf moſt excellent, and founded on the higheſt reaſon, there is a great deal of ſkill and judgment required in order to a rational and ſucceſsful defenſe of it. We ought not only to underſtand it thoroughly ourſelves, before we attempt to recommend it to others, but ſhould take care to ſupport it by none but *ſolid* arguments, that will bear being examined, and ſtand the teſt of

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of a ſtrict and critical enquiry; and to give *proper* anſwers to the objections of its adverſaries. For, by an ill management, we may injure and expoſe the beſt cauſe in the world; and when the oppoſers of religion find that our arguments for it are weak and trifling, they will eaſily be perſuaded to triumph, as if they had gained a compleat victory; and imagining, tho' without juſt ground, that this is all that can be ſaid in vindication of it, their prejudices will be more ſtrong and invincible. This is eſpecially true with reſpect to our reaſonings about the *providence* of God, upon which all religion depends. The ſame way of anſwering objections will not do in all caſes; but, on the contrary, what may be very properly urged at one time, will, at another, leave the truth quite naked and defenſeleſs; nay, in the opinion of the ignorant and prejudiced, ſtrengthen the cauſe of *infidelity*.

Thus the words of the text were very *pertinently* applied by St. *Paul*, as I ſhall have occaſion to ſhew in the following diſcourſe; but have been uſed by others, who overlook the particular caſe of which

which the apoſtle was treating, in an- SERM.
ſwer to objections to which they are by V.
no means adapted; objections that are
really *unanſwerable*, being againſt ſuppoſed methods of conduct in the Deity, which are abſolutely inconſiſtent with juſtice and goodneſs. And ſince, beſides this, ſuch principles have been inferred from them, as repreſent the ſupreme and moſt perfect being under the character of a mere *arbitrary* ſovereign; and render it impoſſible for us to *judge of*, or *argue from* his moral perfections, which are the only foundation of amiable conceptions of him, and of the true peace and comfort of mens minds, as well as the ſureſt rule we have to direct us in our religious enquiries; I think I cannot imploy your time more profitably, than in ſettling the true ſenſe of this text, and guarding it againſt miſconſtructions. Eſpecially if it be conſidered, that 'tis but too natural for unthinking people to make ill uſes of it, injurious to the honour of God, and the cauſe of piety and virtue. I ſhall therefore,

I. Point

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I. Point out two or three things that are not imply'd in it.

II. Propoſe a few caſes, to which, if they could happen, and were urged as objections againſt the providence of God, it would not be a ſufficient and rational reply. And then,

III. Shew to what caſes theſe words may be properly applied.

I. I am to point out two or three things that are not implied in the text, but are falſe and groundleſs inferences from it. And,

1*ſt.* We ought not to infer from it, that God is a deſpotic *arbitrary* Sovereign, whoſe *will* is the only rule of his actions. The great God, tho' he be ſupreme and accountable to none, always governs himſelf by the eternal and unalterable rules of wiſdom, equity, and goodneſs. His will is not, *itſelf*, the ſtandard and meaſure of right; but there is an intrinſic neceſſary difference,

in the *nature of things*, between juſt and unjuſt, beneficence and cruelty, that cannot be altered by the authority, will, or determination of any being whatſoever. Indeed, what God wills is always right and fit, always, upon the whole, fitteſt and beſt. But why? not merely becauſe he *wills* it, but becauſe he is neceſſarily wiſe, juſt and good. For can any man imagine, that if he ſhould will to deceive, to vex and torment his innocent creatures, and employ his infinite power only to make them miſerable (which is a very poſſible ſuppoſition, if his *will alone* be the rule of his proceedings) ſuch a conduct would be *juſtifiable*; nay, for even this muſt be maintained as a neceſſary conſequence from ſuch principles, that it would be *better* and more *praiſe-worthy* than righteouſneſs, truth and mercy? SERM. V.

There cannot be a more diſhonourable reflection on the Deity, than to ſuppoſe he acts without a reaſon, merely from *humour*, and *arbitrary pleaſure*. It repreſents him as a *tyrant*, not as a *wiſe* and *righteous* Governour. It renders him *frightful* to our contemplations, the object

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ject of *averſion* and *horror*, and deſtroys all rational eſteem and love of him, and confidence in him. All expectations of favour from him muſt ſink and vaniſh at once. For who knows how ſuch a *capricious* being, who is not determined by reaſon and juſtice, but makes his will his only law, who can know, I ſay, in what manner he will act?—What poſſible aſſurance can there be, that he will not reſolve on the *miſery*, and *ruin*, of his rational creatures? Nay, if he has promiſed the contrary, can we have any probability that the ſame *arbitrary will* that made, will not alſo break the promiſe? Mere will and humour are *fickle*, *uncertain*, *changeable* things, but truth and goodneſs are *ſteady* principles, and a ſolid foundation for our truſt and hope. I ſhall only add, that the repreſenting the Deity in this manner renders him infinitely more *formidable* than any *earthly tyrants* ever were, or can be, even thoſe who have been the greateſt ſcourges and plagues to mankind, becauſe he is poſſeſt of almighty and uncontroulable power; and the thought of almighty power,

power, that is not directed by wiſdom and goodneſs, muſt fill the mind with the utmoſt *aſtoniſhment* and *terror*.—Shall we then give ſuch a *reproachful*, ſuch a *deteſtable* character of the moſt perfect, the moſt amiable of all beings? —Shall we picture the very *beſt* of beings as the very *worſt*?——And repreſent him, in whoſe unerring wiſdom, ſtrict impartial juſtice, and univerſal unchangeable goodneſs, the whole rational world have the higheſt reaſon to *rejoice*, as one that every wiſe man muſt wiſh *not to exiſt*.

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2*dly*. It can't be inferred from the text, that men are not to enquire into the reaſons of God's proceedings; or that they are, in no caſes, able to judge of the juſtice of his methods of providence. For God himſelf, in the ſcriptures, frequently *appeals* to mankind concerning the equity of the general rules of his providential government. From whence 'tis plain, that even he, that moſt perfect being, who is directed by abſolute and invariable reaſon, would not have us *believe implicitly* that any thing is juſt becauſe he does

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does it; but only requires of us to approve of it so far, as we can reconcile it to the general principles of justice and equity. In making this appeal God evidently supposes, that the *reason* of mankind is not only capable of judging in *matters of religion*, but of determining concerning *his actions*; at least concerning the fitness of the *general rules*, by which he governs the world. And therefore men are *over modest*, when they refuse to allow their reason that honour which the great Creator himself has done it; when they represent it as blind and erroneous in cases of the highest importance; and as knowing no more, and having no more distinct and proper ideas of the moral perfections of the supreme Governour, than the brutes that are void of understanding. Little do they consider how much they dishonour and disparage the *infinite wisdom* of God, when they disgrace and vilify their own reason; how much, I say, they dishonour the infinite wisdom of God, who hath appealed to this *discarded abandoned* reason to decide in points of the utmost

moſt conſequence, and as the rule by which we muſt be *ultimately* conducted, in all our religious enquiries. For, indeed, whether God had appealed to it or no, men muſt, if they think, neceſſarily follow its directions; and no authority whatever, however it may *reſtrain* and *terrify*, can make them *believe* any principles, or approve of any actions as *juſt* and *right*, which are evidently repugnant to it. SERM. V.

And if we are capable of judging concerning the equity of thoſe rules by which the divine government is exerciſed, the *general principles* of juſtice muſt be the ſame both with reſpect to God and man. If they are different with reſpect to our Maker, and are ſomething *myſterious*, and *incomprehenſible*, *we know not what*, 'tis impoſſible we ſhould be able to determine, in any inſtance, whether the divine conduct be juſt, or unjuſt; for how can we judge *without ideas?* And thus an eſſential perfection of the Deity will be impoſſible to be demonſtrated by us, which, notwithſtanding, is a fundamental principle of all religion. Indeed there may

SERM. V. be difficulties, to such imperfect and short-sighted creatures as we are, in judging of *particular actings* of providence, for want of understanding the *entire scheme* that the great governour of the world is pursuing; but if we suppose that God himself can, for instance, punish his creatures for what they could not help, and yet be clear of the charge of *injustice*, we confound and destroy the necessary and immutable distinction between good and evil; and make it impossible for mankind to imitate his moral perfections, in which their highest honour and happiness consists. We could, then, have no probability what kind of behaviour was likely to be pleasing to him, nor what scheme of religion was most worthy of him. Nay we could not be sure that the *best* of men would not be the objects of his displeasure, and the *worst* his peculiar favourites; and, consequently, the practice of religion, and pursuit of virtue, would really be, as its enemies misrepresent it, no better than *enthusiasm*.

And

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And from what has been ſaid it neceſſarily follows, that the Supreme being will never think we do him honour, if we give ſuch an account of the conduct of his providence, as contradicts *our natural notions of juſtice and equity*. Nay, to ſay that he is *unjuſt* may be more honourable to him, than to give him the character of a *righteous* being. For upon the ſuppoſition that the general notion of juſtice is *quite diſtinct*, in God, from what it is in man, if we ſay the Deity is unjuſt, we ſay a thing of which we have no certain determinate idea, and, conſequently, nothing that is directly injurious to his abſolute perfection. The word injuſtice is a mere *empty ſound*, without meaning. But if we affirm that he may deceive his creatures, or puniſh them beyond what their iniquities deſerve, we repreſent him, *really*, as an evil vitious being, one whom every wiſe and good man muſt abhor; and conſequently, fix a reproach upon his character, that no *nominal compliments* can atone for. For even ſuch imperfect creatures as we, if

SERM. V. *juſt* and *good* were made to ſignify *tyranny* and *cruelty*, ſhould be ſo far from being fond of accepting the title, that we ſhould reject it, if it was offered us, with diſdain and indignation.

There is a phraſe commonly uſed, which, perhaps, has led ſome perſons into the miſtakes I have been guarding againſt, *viz.* that the end which God deſigns, in all his actions, in the creation and providential government of the world, is *his own glory*. The expreſſion itſelf is, undoubtedly, capable of a juſt and rational ſenſe; but has been groſsly miſapplied, and made to ſignify, what it can never fairly ſignify, ſomething *diſtinct* from, and even *inconſiſtent* with, the exerciſe of juſtice and goodneſs. And, indeed, tis natural for men to interpret it agreeably to the notions they entertain of God; and, conſequently, with perſons whoſe apprehenſions are different, it will have a quite different meaning, and be either true, or falſe, as their apprehenſions are rational or otherwiſe. Thus if men conceive of God as a mere *abſolute ſovereign*, according

according to them his glory muſt con- SERM. ſiſt in the exerciſe of an *uncontroulable* V. and *unaccountable ſovereignty*, and every thing will be right merely becauſe he wills it, and has reſiſtleſs power to effect it. But this, I have ſhewn, is figuring the almighty being as a *tyrant*, who delights in nothing but lawleſs will, and arbitrary dominion; whereas the true glory of a ſovereign is in the wiſdom, juſtice, and clemency of his government. Again, if we imagine it to be the chief attribute of the Deity, that he is *ſtrict* and *rigorous* in puniſhing, his glory will be moſt eminently diſplayed when he is moſt *ſtiff* and *inexorable*, when he has moſt of *ſtern inflexible ſeverity*, and leaſt of *mercy*. But if we believe him to be neceſſarily *wiſe*, *righteous*, and *good*, it will then be his chief glory to exerciſe an *equal* and *impartial*, but, at the ſame time, a *gracious* providence over all his creatures; and invariably to purſue the fitteſt meaſures to promote the *general good*. And I may appeal to all mankind, if they will lay aſide their prejudices, and conſult only their reaſon, whether this does

SERM. V. not give a vaſtly more honourable and amiable notion of him, than the deſcribing him either as an *arbitrary ſovereign*, or an *unrelenting judge*. The glory of God can't be a diſtinct conſideration from the exerciſe of his moral perfections for the happineſs of his creatures, becauſe in this view he appears moſt excellent, and in the higheſt honour and dignity, as creator and governour of the univerſe, and the compaſſionate father of all intelligent beings. And a defect in *power*, *knowledge*, or *extent of dominion*, would not ſtain and obſcure his glory, in any degree of compariſon, like acts of *injuſtice*, and *cruelty*. I proceed now,

2*dly*. Having pointed out ſome general principles that are falſely inferred from the text, *nay, but, O man, who art thou that replieſt againſt God?* to mention, briefly, a few caſes, to which if they could happen, and were urged as objections againſt the providence of God, it would not be a *ſufficient*, and *rational* reply. And, in general, ſuch an anſwer muſt be very *weak* and *trifling* in all caſes,

cases, that are evidently repugnant to justice and goodness. Thus if we could suppose, that God had absolutely determined the final and eternal misery of great numbers of his rational creatures, or that he tempted and excited them to sin, that he enjoined impracticable duties, and punished any for not believing or not doing impossibilities; if these extravagant things, I say, could be supposed of the supreme and all-perfect being, who is *righteous in all his ways*, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*; it would be the most *impertinent* thing in the world, to think to satisfy the reason of mankind by resolving all into his *sovereignty*, and saying *who art thou, that replieſt againſt God?* The *sovereignty* of God, and his right to act as he pleases in cases where justice is not concerned, is not the thing disputed, but his *equity* and *goodness*; which can only be vindicated by shewing, either that the above-mentioned methods of acting are not instances of *arbitrariness* and *cruelty*, or that arbitrariness and cruelty, which are reckon'd SERM. V.

SERM. V. monſtrous crimes in all other beings, are no *blemiſhes* in God's government of the world.

Indeed, had I a notion of the ſupreme creator and father of mankind (I ſpeak it with quite different ſentiments, and with the higheſt eſteem and reverence of his moral character) but had I really a notion of him as deſtitute of equity and benevolence, and acting only for the oſtentation of his ſupreme power, and ſovereign dominion, I might, perhaps, think it *prudent* not to complain, that I might not expoſe myſelf to the reſentment of ſo terrible an enemy;—but would there be ever the leſs *reaſon* for complaint? The *mouth* of the *objector* might be ſtopped by his fears;—but would the *force* of the *objection* be at all abated? It could not be, as long as there remained any difference in actions, any diſtinction of juſt and unjuſt. For if *power alone* does not conſtitute right (and if it does, the moſt powerful, in every degree, muſt be *univerſally*, and without *exception*, the moſt righteous) the *greateſt* being, be his power

power ever so extensive, and his domi- SERM.
nion ever so uncontroulable, can have no V.
more authority to be unjust and cruel
than the meanest; but, on the contrary,
will be, in proportion, a more *evil* and
mischievous being, and more justly the ob-
ject of universal abhorrence. It remains
to be enquired,

3*dly*. To what cases the words of the text may be *properly* applied. Now this will be best determined by considering the particular argument the Apostle was pursuing, and to which they immediately relate. In the 2[d] and 3[d] verses of this chapter, he laments, in a very *pathetic* manner, the dismal fate of his countrymen, who were cast off from being the people of God, and devoted to destruction, for their wilful opposition to the gospel, after they had been long distinguished by peculiar and extraordinary privileges. In the 6th verse he insinuates an objection, *viz.* that by rejecting the *Jews*, the *word*, or promise of *God*, which was made to the seed of *Abraham* would not have its *effect*; and, in answer

to

SERM. V. to it, obſerves theſe two things. 1*ſt*. That the deſcendants of *Jacob*, or *Iſrael*, did not make up the whole of *Iſrael*, or the people of God comprehended in the promiſe; but as he argues more diſtinctly in the 4th chapter of this Epiſtle, *ver.* 11, *&c.* all thoſe *Gentiles* were included, who trod in the ſteps of *Abraham*'s faith; and, conſequently, the calling them to the advantages of the *Meſſiah*'s kingdom was not *fruſtrating*, but *fulfilling* the promiſe. And, 2*dly*. That the promiſe was never made to all the *natural* race of *Abraham*. This he proves, *ver.* 9. from the words of the promiſe it ſelf, *at this time will I come*; *and* Sarah *ſhall have a Son*. Nor was this the only limitation of the ſeed of *Abraham*; for, as he adds, *when* Rebecca *alſo had conceived by one, even by our Father* Iſaac, (*the* children *being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpoſe of God, according to election, might ſtand, not of works, but of him that calleth) it was ſaid unto her, the elder ſhall ſerve the younger*. The ſenſe of which

which words is plainly this, that " God, SERM. " while the children were yet in their mo- V. " thers womb, and, consequently, before " they could, by their actions, either re- " commend themselves to his favour, or " merit his displeasure, determined that " the posterity of *Esau* should serve those " of *Jacob*; in order to shew, that his " making any family, or race of men " his peculiar people, or, in other words, " his taking them under his special pro- " tection, and conferring extraordinary " advantages upon them, depended on " his own wise purpose, as having a " right to bestow his favours on whom " he pleased, and not on any works and " deserts of theirs." That this whole paragraph does not at all relate to *Jacob* and *Esau* considered *personally* is evident from hence, that it is not true *personally*, but only in a *national* sense, that *the elder* did *serve the younger*. Again, the text in *Genesis*, to which here is a reference, proves unquestionably, that this was the only thing intended in the promise: *Two NATIONS are in thy womb, and*

the

SERM. V. Gen. xxv. 23.

the one PEOPLE shall be stronger than the other PEOPLE, and the elder shall serve the younger. And finally, that noted passage, Jacob *have I loved, but* Esau *have I hated*, speaks only of the distinction which God, in his providence, made between the race of *Jacob* and *Esau*, with respect to *temporal* and *outward* advantages. For the words, of which St. *Paul* quotes only the general substance, stand thus in the prophet *Malachi*; *I have loved you, saith the Lord, yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not* Esau Jacob's *brother? yet I loved* Jacob, Mal. i. 2,3. *and I hated* Esau;——but how!——*and laid his mountains and his heritage waste.*

Having sufficiently answered the first objection, the apostle comes to another, verse the 14th. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* "Is it any injustice in God to "choose one people before another, to "confer upon them extraordinary fa"vours? By no means." This he argues, with the *Jews*, from several passages in their own Scriptures. And in the

the text, and ſome following verſes (upon which I ſhall give you the excellent paraphraſe of the great Mr. *Locke*) he argues the ſame point from the reaſon of the thing. *Nay, but, O man, who art thou that replieſt againſt God? Shall the thing formed ſay to him that formed it,* " Shall the nations that are made great, " or little, ſhall kingdoms that are raiſed, " or depreſs'd, ſay to him in whoſe " hands they are to diſpoſe of them as " he pleaſes," *Why haſt thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the ſame lump to make one veſſel to honour, and another to diſhonour? What if God willing to ſhew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured, with much long ſuffering, the veſſels of wrath fitted to deſtruction? And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the veſſels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory?* " What if God willing to " puniſh the ſinful people of the *Jews*, " and to do it ſo as to have his power " known, and taken notice of in the doing " it, bore with them a long time, even " after

SERM. V.

SERM. V. " after they had deſerved his wrath, as " he did with *Pharaoh*, that his hand " might be the more eminently viſible " in their deſtruction? And that alſo " at the ſame time he might, with the " more glory, make known his goodneſs " and mercy to the *Gentiles*, whom, ac- " cording to his purpoſe, he was in a " readineſs to receive into the glorious " ſtate of being his people under the " goſpel?"

I hope it appears, from what has been ſaid, that this whole chapter, which has been ſo confounded and darkened, relates only to God's dealings with *nations* and *collective bodies* of men; and not to his favour or diſpleaſure towards *particular perſons*, and determining abſolutely, without any regard to their actions, their *eternal ſtate* hereafter. The argument then, that St. *Paul* purſues, is only this, that God might diſpenſe his *extraordinary* favours as he ſaw fit; and, conſequently, eminently diſtinguiſh one nation, and paſs by others, without the leaſt *injuſtice*; and that to cenſure ſuch a way of proceeding, in the

the *proprietor* and *ſovereign diſpoſer* of all things, was arrogant and preſumptuous. And from hence we learn, to what queſtions the words of the text may be *properly* and *juſtly* applied, *viz.* to ſuch as theſe; —— why God vouchſafes a revelation of his will to *ſome* nations, and not to *others?* —— why, for example, he has not made the chriſtian *univerſal?* —— why does he permit *moral*, and *natural* evil? —— why has he not made all creatures of the *higheſt order*, and communicated to all *equal degrees* of perfection and happineſs? Nothing of this can be ſhewn to be contrary to juſtice, becauſe they are, all, favours, which his creatures have no right to *claim*. And therefore in theſe, and all other caſes of a *like* nature, where juſtice is not concerned; which have no appearance of *malice* or *cruelty*, but are conſiderations of *wiſdom* only; 'tis very *pertinent* and *rational* to ſay to an objector, *nay, but, O man, who art thou that replieſt againſt God?* We learn from this diſcourſe, SERM. V.

1*ſt*. How neceſſary 'tis that we conſider the *uſes* to which paſſages of ſcripture

SERM. V. ture are applied, and don't argue *generally* from what is only adapted to a *particular* caſe. This is one reaſon why texts have been ſo abominably perverted, and ſtrained to ſuch *abſurd* and *unnatural* ſenſes, as are not only contrary to their true deſign, and the general ſcope and tenor of the revelation, but ſtrike at the foundation of all religion.

2*dly*. Let us cultivate in our minds the higheſt reverence of God, eſpecially the moſt honourable apprehenſions of his *moral* character; and being perſuaded that all his counſels are the reſult of *infinite wiſdom*, and that his will is ever determined by the *higheſt reaſon*, let us humbly acquieſce in all the methods of his providence. Survey the work of God, the exquiſite beauty and harmony of *the whole*, the admirable connection and ſubſerviency of *the ſeveral parts*; nay ſurvey *thy own frame*, the curious and aſtoniſhing ſtructure of thy body, the noble faculties and capacities of thy mind; and from the ſurprizing marks of wiſdom and goodneſs, which thou canſt *diſtinctly*

distinctly perceive, in *thine own make*, and in the *whole constitution* of things, draw the just and natural inference, *viz.* that the great author and governour of the universe is possest of these perfections in the most *absolute* and *compleat* manner; and, consequently, that all things are contrived and order'd with the same *wise* and *benevolent* view, tho', in particulars, it does not appear *equally*, and in some, perhaps, *not at all* to thy limited understanding. SERM. V.

The improving constantly in our minds worthy notions of God, as a being supremely *wise*, and immutably *just* and *good*, will be attended with very great advantages.—— It will restrain that impertinent humour of *scepticism* and *cavilling*, which makes men oppose their ignorance and prejudices to his infinite wisdom.——We shall always consider the Deity, as the most *amiable* and *delightful* object of our contemplation; neither as a weak capricious being, whom we cannot *reverence*; nor as a rigid tyrannical being, whom we cannot *love*.——And,

SERM. V. finally, our religion, built on ſuch principles, will be *wiſe* and *rational*; and there can be no foundation for any of thoſe *ſuperſtitious* and *enthuſiaſtic* mixtures, which expoſe the moſt excellent and uſeful thing in the world to *contempt* and *ridicule*.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Of the abuſes of free-thinking.

GALAT. v. 13.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only uſe *not liberty for an occaſion to the fleſh.*——

THERE is not a more valuable bleſſing in human life, than *liberty*. *Civil liberty* is the baſis of all ſocial happineſs; and *liberty of conſcience* the only foundation of a rational religion. When this latter is reſtrain'd, we are treated rather like *brutes* than men; *i. e.* creatures

SERM. VI. endued with moral powers, and accountable for their actions. And therefore 'tis one of the chief excellencies of the Chriſtian religion, and very far from the air and ſpirit of an *impoſture*, that it preſerves the rights of conſcience ſacred and inviolable. But becauſe the world is apt to run into *extremes*, the writers of the New Teſtament, like perſons who had a thorough knowledge of human nature, have taken care in this reſpect, as well as in all others, to guard againſt *exceſs* and *irregularity*. Thus St. *Paul*, in the text, adviſes the *Galatians* not to miſtake *licentiouſneſs* for Chriſtian liberty; or, in other words, not to imagine, that becauſe they were freed from the expenſive, and burthenſom obſervances of the *Moſaic* inſtitution, which are elegantly deſcrib'd as a ſtate of *ſervitude*, they were diſcharg'd, likewiſe, from moral obligations, which are an eternal and immutable law to all rational beings. I intend to conſider the ſubject in a different light, ſuited to the complection and genius of the *preſent age*; and

and ſhall enquire into ſome of the chief abuſes of *free-thinking*, by which, it happens, that what is really the peculiar *honour*, and greateſt *advantage* of our intelligent nature, becomes a *reproach* to it, and is attended with moſt *injurious* conſequences. And, SERM. VI.

1*ſt.* Embracing the principle of liberty has ended, with many, in *infidelity*, or a diſbelief of all religion. 'Tis moſt evident, that infidelity never more abounded than in this age of *free-enquiry*; and that thoſe who are moſt looſe in their ſentiments with reſpect to the obligations of religion in general, and of Chriſtianity in particular, are, in profeſſion at leaſt, enemies to *bigotry* and *implicit faith*. Nay, it may be allowed farther, that 'tis likely they wou'd never have gone ſuch a length as to throw off all religion, if they had continued in a blind attachment to the principles of their education, and to eſtabliſhed and popular opinions.——Whence now can this ariſe?——We who believe that religion, in all the parts of it, is ſtrictly

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rational, can never allow that it is the natural conſequence of a *free* and *impartial examination* of it; but muſt ſuppoſe, on the contrary, that the more thoroughly 'tis conſider'd, and the more nicely weighed in the ballance of true and unbiaſsed reaſon, it will be the more heartily believed and ſubmitted to. And I doubt not but I ſhall be able to make it appear, that this melancholy event may be ſufficiently accounted for from other cauſes; and that it not only may, but oftentimes does proceed, not from a *ſuperior underſtanding*, or more *adequate* and *enlarged views* of things, but from *ignorance*, *ſuperficial enquiry*, and even from that *prejudice* and *implicit faith*, which the monopolizers of reaſon and free-thinking ſo loudly diſclaim. I would not be thought, by any thing I am now advancing, to diſcourage the moſt rational and free examination of all religious principles, be they ever ſo *ſacred*, and *venerable*, and tranſmitted down with ever ſo much *awe* and *ſolemnity* by our forefathers; nor would I be thought to aſſert,

aſſert, that any man is oblig'd to receive a revelation, which, upon mature deliberation, appears to be unworthy of God, and repugnant to the reaſon and nature of things. For my only deſign is to point out ſome falſe principles which are all *an abuſe* of the true principle of liberty; and by which, 'tis highly probable, many of the *profeſs'd admirers*, and *zealous eſpouſers* of it, have been led to a diſregard both of *revealed*, and *natural* religion. And, SERM. VI.

1*ſt*. It frequently happens, that after men have *rejected* ſome principles, which, before, they looked upon as very important, nay eſſential parts of Chriſtianity, upon being convinced that they have as little foundation in the Chriſtian revelation, as in the reaſon of things, they ſtill retain others, equally repugnant both to reaſon, and ſcripture. In ſome time they are perſuaded, either by converſation, reading, or their own inward reflections, that theſe likewiſe are *abſurd* and *irrational*; but inſtead of *enquiring*, as becomes honeſt ſearchers after truth, *take it for granted*, all the while, that

SERM. VI. they are real doctrines of Chriſtianity. The conſequence of which is, that the Chriſtian religion itſelf is rejected as falſe, becauſe ſuch doctrines, which are erroneouſly reckoned as parts of it, cannot be true. Thus, for inſtance, a man reaſons that God can't be an arbitrary being, who has no regard to the moral fitneſs of things; or an ill natured being, who, purely for the oſtentation of his uncontroulable power and ſovereignty, has abſolutely determined the final miſery and ruin of great numbers of his reaſonable creatures; that no miracles can prove ſuch doctrines to be from God, becauſe they are a diſhonour to his moral perfections; and, conſequently, no religion that teaches and inculcates them, whatever its external atteſtations are, can be of divine authority. But they paſs, *among many*, for important principles of the Chriſtian religion, and therefore Chriſtianity is an *impoſture*.

——But why? May not Chriſtians *miſrepreſent* the doctrines of the religion which they profeſs?—— Or is it fit

fit that any religion ſhould be condemned, before 'tis examin'd, merely from *hear-ſay?*——Is this *freedom of thought*, and *rational enquiry?*——Far from it. 'Tis *rank prejudice* under the cover of that amiable name, and a prejudice, which if it was ſuffer'd to prevail in all caſes, would render it impoſſible for men to form a right judgment of things, and leave no way, by which to diſtinguiſh between *true* and *falſe religions*. For at this rate, there is nothing ſo extravagant but may be charg'd upon the *beſt* and moſt *unexceptionable* ſcheme in the world, as eaſily as upon the *worſt*; and it will not be in the power of God to make a revelation to his intelligent creatures, that may not be rejected, tho' it be ever ſo *excellent* in itſelf, and brings with it the *higheſt* and *nobleſt* credentials. SERM. VI.

Again, when men, upon a rational and free enquiry, have found *ſome* of the principles in which they were educated, and in whoſe favour they had been a long time prepoſſeſſed, to be falſe; inſtead of

SERM. VI. of reſting here, they draw this moſt *unjuſt* and *unnatural* inference, that the *whole* of religion is deceit and impoſture. Becauſe they are convinced that *ſome doctrines*, which they had formerly an high opinion of, are abſurd and irrational, therefore *all revelation* muſt be diſgraced and vilified. And if they have any inſtances of the *corruption of Prieſts*, and of their deſign to enſlave mankind, in order to advance their ſecular dominion, and ſerve their ambition, and worldly intereſt by the ignorance and credulity of the common people, tho' at the expence of the eternal and immutable obligations of morality and virtue (of which, to the *reproach* of our holy religion, examples have been but too too frequent) preſently Chriſtianity itſelf is nothing but *Prieſt-craft*; the invention of *deſigning* men to keep the world *in awe*, and, by an artful management of their conſciences, to *pick their pockets*, and *plunder their eſtates*. Thus they ruſh *at once* to a concluſion, without having any premiſes that will ſupport it; and draw conſequences from things that have no *relation*

tion to, or *connection* with each other; and yet, all this while, ſet up for *cloſe reaſoners*, and *free enquirers!* — Never, ſurely, was the name of *rational liberty* ſo groſsly abuſed? For ſuch a conduct as this, this way of believing upon no foundation at all, and concluding that becauſe one thing is falſe, another which is abſolutely diſtinct from it is ſo likewiſe, argues a very *ſhallow* judgment, great *confuſion* of thought, and ſtrong *prejudice*. SERM. VI.

Another abuſe of the principle of liberty is this, that ſome men ſeem to think, that becauſe they have a right to reject all pretended principles of religion, which are contrary to reaſon, to the perfections of the ſupreme being, and the eternal laws of piety and virtue, they may likewiſe, throw off the belief of every thing that they can't fully account for; and are no more oblig'd, for example, to believe a providence, becauſe the viſible courſe of things is perplex'd and intricate, full of diſorder and ſeeming injuſtice, and not ſuch,

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ſuch as they imagine it would be, if the univerſe was govern'd by an abſolutely wiſe and good being; than they are to receive ſuch doctrines as aſſert that God is a rigorous, ſevere, and inexorable ſovereign, one that delights in the miſery of his creatures, *&c.* and deſtroy the neceſſary and unalterable diſtinction between moral good and evil. This, I ſay, is another too *common abuſe* of the principle of liberty, leading to a disbelief even of the firſt principles of natural religion; an abuſe that argues great *narrowneſs* of mind, and is what perſons of any *compaſs* and *freedom* of thought can't be guilty of.

They are only *little underſtandings* that are inclin'd to be *prophane* and *atheiſtical*, from their ignorance of particular events in the courſe of providence; whilſt thoſe of a more *refined genius*, and the *niceſt obſervation*, always abound in ſuch reflections as theſe. "We can't "deſcribe the thouſandth part of the "beauty, and much leſs of the uſe-"fulneſs, of the *minuteſt* work of the

" great Creator, and ſhall we pretend SERM.
" to arraign and cenſure the *whole courſe* VI.
" of his providential government? As
" far as we *underſtand* of *nature*, all the
" parts of it appear to be contrived and
" formed to the utmoſt advantage; e-
" very thing has its proper uſe, and no-
" thing is ſuperfluous or defective. And
" as far as we *underſtand* of *providence*,
" all its operations are in admirable
" wiſdom, and with the moſt kind and
" benevolent deſign. And is not this a
" reaſonable preſumption, that what ap-
" pears *confuſed* and *intricate* to us is
" perfectly harmonious and beautiful,
" wiſe, juſt and good? This is certainly
" the moſt *natural concluſion* we can
" make, if we conſider the narrow com-
" paſs of the human underſtanding, and
" the *ſcantineſs* of its moſt extended
" knowledge; that we can't compre-
" hend the *whole* ſcheme of God's go-
" vernment, and, conſequently, may ea-
" ſily err in judging of *particular* pro-
" vidences; and that there muſt, of ne-
" ceſſity, be ſome things in the tranſ-

" actions

SERM. VI. "actions of an *infinite* mind unfathomable by *finite* reaſon." Theſe will be the reflections of a *judicious* enquirer, who has any knowledge of *himſelf*, and of *nature*. And all ſuch, on the other hand, are but vain *pretenders* to rational freedom, who preſume to meaſure *all things* by the ſtandard of their imperfect reaſon, and will admit nothing to be true, if they can't ſolve *every difficulty* that attends it; not even that God governs the world, if he does it in a way above their *conceptions*, i. e. in other words, in a way, in which ignorant and fallible men could not, *themſelves*, direct and manage the affairs of it. Such perſons, I ſay, are but vain *pretenders* to free enquiry, which neceſſarily ſuppoſes, as the foundation of it, a *modeſt* temper of mind, conſcious of its own weakneſs and imperfection; and as it prompts us to examine all things, that are within the *ſphere* of our knowledge, with care and impartiality, to reject as falſe whatever is contrary to plain and certain principles of reaſon, and embrace nothing as

true, but upon proper evidence; ſo it always reſtrains from paſſing a judgment, or determining concerning the truth or falſhood of things, about which we have *no ideas*, and which are beyond the *reach* of our preſent faculties. For all judgments and deciſions of this kind, which are *above* our underſtandings, and conſequently can have no rational foundation to ſupport them, are not only the heighth of *enthuſiaſm*, but the utmoſt pitch of *vanity* and *arrogance*. SERM VI.

Some, again, ſeem to miſtake *liberty* for a right to *diſpute every thing*, and cavil at all religious principles, which are commonly received, merely to ſhew that they are *free thinkers*. The great delight of theſe people, who are often to be met with, is to puzzle a controverſy, and ſtart objections againſt ſome point or other of revealed religion; not from a deſire of having them *conſidered* and *ſolved*; but, either to ſhew their *parts*, or for the ſake of embarraſſing and diſtreſſing weak minds, who having, perhaps, neither capacity, nor leiſure for cloſe

SERM. VI.

cloſe thinking, can't ſee thro' the ſophiſtry of their pretended arguments. Such perſons are, generally ſpeaking, the fartheſt that can be from *freedom* and *largeneſs* of mind. For either they will not ſtay to hear their objections confuted, which is the leaſt that can be expected from a *candid* and *ingenuous* ſpirit; or, if they are gravelled and confounded, make a ſhift to forget it ſoon, and repeat the ſame empty cavils over again, to the next company they meet, with as much unconcernedneſs and aſſurance as if they had never received any anſwer to them. Whether theſe men are, really, in *ſentiment* againſt religion, or whether they diſpute only for their *diverſion*, or from a *talkative* humour, or an odd affectation of an *uncommon* ſpirit of liberty, I will not take upon me to determine. However this be, they can't take it amiſs if they are ranked on the ſide of *infidelity*, becauſe they are always talking againſt religion, but never defending it.

Indeed

Indeed every one has an undoubted right to debate, in his mind, upon all principles before he receives them, whether they are true or falſe; and no wiſe man will take up any opinion *implicitly*, how powerfully ſoever it may be recommended by *great names*, and *worldly advantages*. But diſputing only for the ſake of *cavilling* is not an *honeſt* and *ingenuous* frame of mind, but *humour*, *pride* and *ſingularity*. And, yet, every one that knows the world muſt ſee, that this practice very much abounds, eſpecially amongſt thoſe, who, for want of judgment, have carried their *free-thinking* to ſuch an unreaſonable height, as becauſe they have found ſome notions, which they once thought parts of chriſtianity, to be falſe, to believe that there is no principle in it true. SERM. VI.

Let me add, that when men are become thus looſe in their regards to reveal'd religion, their *vanity* may put them upon ſtriking out *new ſchemes*, in order to render themſelves *conſiderable*.

SERM. VI. There is a ſtrong itch in mankind after *fame*, eſpecially to be thought eminent for qualities that are *highly eſteemed*, as arguments of a *great* and *generous* mind. And this may eaſily be ſuppoſed to be the ſpring of ſome mens oppoſition to the principles of revelation, becauſe they are ever full of it; and ſolicitous only to urge difficulties, and not at all to offer what may be ſaid in its vindication. They think, perhaps, by this means, to paſs for perſons whoſe underſtandings are enlarged from vulgar prejudices, and who, in their purſuits after knowledge, are under no biaſs; not influenced by cuſtom, human authority, eſtabliſhed and popular opinions, nor by any conſideration but the abſtract reaſon and truth of things. And when they have raiſed plauſible objections, and urged them for ſome time, tho' at firſt, perhaps, they had no deſign to hurt chriſtianity by them, yet their thoughts being continually turned againſt it, and never employed in its defenſe, they may come at laſt to think that their objections

objections have ſome weight; and by degrees, to imagine that they are more and more important; and in the end, that they are of ſufficient ſtrength to overthrow the chriſtian religion, and prove it an impoſture.——And thus, what was, at firſt, only *vanity*, may, by degrees, be confirmed and ſettled *infidelity*.——And, to forward this melancholy effect, ſeveral other circumſtances may concur. The *oppoſition* ſuch perſons frequently meet with will make them more eager in oppoſing, more tenacious of what they have advanced, and inclined to maintain it. It will put them upon *ſtrengthning* their objections as much as poſſible; upon finding out *new ſalvos* to remove the difficulties that lie in their way; and more ſubtle *quirks* and *evaſions*, whereby to render the poſitive evidences of the truth of chriſtianity weak and inconcluſive.——Till what they aſſerted and urged, for a long time, only for *cavilling* ſake, or from *the ſpirit of contradiction* that is too natural to eager diſputants, they think

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SERM. VI. themſelves obliged *in honour* to ſtand by, as their own *genuine* ſentiments.

I ſhall conclude this head with obſerving, that there are many who profeſs a great value and zeal for free and impartial enquiry into religious opinions, and perhaps know ſomething, in *general*, of the reaſonableneſs and excellency of it, and yet have but a confuſed notion of the *principle itſelf*, and underſtand very little either of its *true nature*, or *extent*; and others who admire it merely becauſe 'tis eſpous'd by thoſe, whom they eſteem as the more *ingenious* and *ſenſible* part of mankind. Both theſe, therefore, are likely to follow, *implicitly*, ſuch whom they regard as the greateſt *patrons* and *defenders* of liberty. And, conſequently, if in the circle of their acquaintance, it happens to be the character of an enlarged and generous ſpirit, not only to take nothing upon truſt, but to queſtion and diſpute the truth of every thing that is generally looked upon as a ſacred principle of religion; they are in danger of miſtaking *Scepti-*

ciſm

ciſm and *cavilling* for rational and im- SERM. partial freedom of thought. For having no fixed ſentiments of their own, there is no way left them but to follow the example of the muſt *noted free-thinkers*, to believe juſt *as much* as they do, and *no more*;——and this, whether it be *any thing*, or *nothing*, is liberty.—— Thus may *liberty* be made to ſtand for *bigotry* and *implicit faith*;——an impartial examination into the nature and evidences of religion may ſignify *having no religion at all*;——and men may aſſume the character of being open to conviction, and free honeſt ſearchers after truth, who are *indolent* and *make no enquiry*.

2. Another abuſe of the principle of liberty is this, that it has led many, who have not proceeded ſo far as a *downright disbelief* of all religion, to pay no regard, or at moſt, but a ſlight and trifling regard, to *inſtrumental* and *poſitive* duties. Impartial enquirers into things have diſcovered the folly and miſchievous conſequences of *ſuperſtition*

SERM. VI. and *enthuſiaſm*; that *reading*, *hearing*, *praying*, &c. can anſwer no valuable purpoſes, farther than as they influence men to govern their paſſions, and behave with juſtice and univerſal benevolence to their fellow creatures; and that placing the whole of religion in *inward impulſes*, a *warm* and *lively imagination*, and *heats* and *raptures* of *devotion*, has been of vaſt diſſervice to the cauſe of ſolid and uſeful virtue. And, undoubtedly, ſo far our rational and free enquiries have been of great uſe to us, by teaching us wherein the ſubſtance of true religion conſiſts, and guarding againſt dangerous errors.

But from hence it has been inferred, that the *inſtrumental* duties of piety are not only *unneceſſary*, but *hurtful*; and that an inward veneration and eſteem of the Deity, improved by frequent and ſerious meditation, is ſufficient, without any outward ſtated acts of worſhip, and all that is fit for us to perform, or our maker to expect.——But how does this follow?——Is it a juſt concluſion, that becauſe

becauſe *ſuperſtition* and *enthuſiaſm* are miſchievous things, therefore a *rational devotion*, that is allowed to have no goodneſs in it but as 'tis ſubſervient to moral purpoſes, can't be helpful to us in the purſuit of virtue? By no means. There is not the leaſt *colour* of reaſon in it, nor can there be a more *forced* and *unnatural* inference. For *ſtated* and *ſolemn* addreſſes to God have a direct tendency to fix, in our minds, an habitual reverence of his perfections, a ſtrong ſenſe of our neceſſary dependance upon him, and continual obligations to him. And theſe ends are likely to be more effectually ſerved by our making *immediate applications* to the ſupreme being, (in which we have the awe of his omniſcience a witneſs to our moſt ſecret thoughts, and of his almighty power that can dreadfully puniſh diſſimulation and falſhood, to reſtrain us from careleſſneſs and levity) than by our *looſe*, *occaſional*, and curſory reflections. There is, moreover, this undeniable advantage ariſing from *public* and *ſocial* SERM. VI.

SERM. VI. worſhip, that it preſerves in the world a general ſenſe of a Deity, and a providence, and of the grand obligations of religion.

Again, our reaſon, upon an impartial enquiry into the nature of things, will inform us, that *moral* duties are infinitely preferable to thoſe of a *poſitive* and *ritual* nature; becauſe the former are eſſentially good, and of eternal immutable authority in all ages, and under every diſpenſation of religion; whereas the latter are required with this view, that they may be ſubſervient to theſe, and, conſequently, are only ſo far valuable, as they anſwer this their ultimate end; and may be changed and varied as circumſtances alter, and according to the particular genius and neceſſities of different ages and nations.

But can it be concluded from hence, which ſeems to be the too prevailing humour of this free inquiſitive age, that *poſitive* duties deſerve *no* regard from us? ——Are they to be *entirely* neglected, becauſe *moral* precepts are of prior obligation,

ligation, and ſuperior excellence? To ſay this is, in effect, to aſſert that one thing can't be *good* becauſe another is better; and becauſe that other is *more uſeful*, this can be of *no ſervice* at all. In truth, beſides that 'tis an *eternal* rule of right, that God ſhould be obey'd in every diſcovery of his will, whether it relates to things of a *poſitive*, or *moral* nature; beſides this, I ſay, the *poſitive* duties of our holy religion have a natural aptitude to ſtrengthen and enforce *moral* obligations, and for that reaſon, ought to be highly valued by us. So that the notion of the *abſolute inſignificancy* of inſtrumental and inſtituted religion is as much an extreme, as the making the *chief part* of virtue and true goodneſs to conſiſt in it; and both proceed, in a great meaſure, from the ſame principle, *viz. a ſlight judgment*, and *ſuperficial enquiry*. And the *ill effects* of this notion are too viſible. For thoſe who have neglected all *external* religion, have been ſo far from improving, as might reaſonably be expected ſince they profeſs

SERM. VI. profeſs to have nothing elſe to mind, that, except in a few inſtances, they rather decline in their zeal for the practice of that *moral* virtue, which they are ſo forward to magnify to the *utter diſparagement* of every thing elſe; they have, I ſay, rather declin'd in their zeal for the practice even of *moral* virtue, in proportion as they have grown cold and remiſs with reſpect to the *ſolemn worſhip* of their maker, and the *inſtrumental* duties of piety.

3*dly*. Freedom of thought, and impartial enquiry into the principles of religion, have been *abuſed* and *perverted*, in the preſent age, by degenerating into a *light trifling* frame of mind, and a humour of treating ſacred things with *ridicule*. With people who affect this way, liberty is nothing elſe but a *free bold* manner of treating all ſubjects *ludicrouſly*, and turning them into a jeſt. They have a great inclination to ſhew their *wit*, eſpecially upon points that afford the *leaſt room* for it; for this diſcovers an *uncommon* genius. And, therefore,

therefore, becauſe religion is the *graveſt* thing in the world, they reſolve to be *merry* with it; and think it a moſt *meritorious* action to laugh at what the generality of the world eſteem and reverence, and endeavour to put all the *wiſe* and *virtuous* part of mankind out of countenance. But ſuch *empty triflers* ought to know, that there can be no true wit which has not *reaſon* for the foundation of it; that ridiculing what is in itſelf *good*, *uſeful*, and *venerable*, fixes a certain reproach upon him that attempts it, either upon his *underſtanding*, or his *morals*; that jeſting with things of the higheſt conſequence is *folly* and *madneſs*; that 'tis an eaſy matter, by *miſrepreſenting*, to make any thing appear ridiculous; and conſequently, that this talent is ſo far from being a demonſtration that the perſon who poſſeſſes it is *a wit*, as 'tis from being an evidence of *his good breeding*, that, in violation of all the rules of *decency*, he banters and treats with *ſcurrility* the eſtabliſhed religion of his country, and that which

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SERM. VI. all around him have a high value for. But I haſten to a concluſion.

From what has been ſaid we learn, that there are no things in themſelves ſo excellent, but what are capable of being *abus'd*; and be their natural conſequences ever ſo friendly and beneficial to mankind, may be made to produce the moſt miſchievous effects. This poſſibility of the corruption of what is moſt wiſe and good neceſſarily reſults from the principle of liberty, which God hath planted in human nature; which, at the ſame time, that it ſuppoſes, that 'tis in a man's power to *improve* his faculties, and the advantages he enjoys, muſt ſuppoſe, that 'tis in his power, likewiſe, ſo to *darken* his judgment by wilful *negligence*, and want of *conſideration*, and giving an unbounded ſcope to *ſenſual* and *irregular* paſſions, as to confound the very plain and unalterable diſtinction that there is, in the nature of things, between truth and falſhood, and between moral good and evil. And as this great and melancholy

choly abuſe is no juſt objection to the *wiſdom* and *goodneſs* of the Creator, ſo neither is it any argument againſt the *excellency* and *uſefulneſs* of the things themſelves; any more than 'tis an argument againſt the *neceſſary ſupports* of life, that they are frequently abuſed to exceſs and intemperance, or againſt *reaſon itſelf*, that 'tis ſometimes employed to undermine the foundations of religion and virtue, to give falſe and plauſible colours to vice and immorality, and in contriving ſuch ſchemes of injuſtice, fraud, and tyranny, as are ſubverſive of the peace and happineſs of the world. Indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, perverting the nature of things, in every inſtance, is nothing elſe but *an abuſe of reaſon*; and therefore, if it concludes any thing, it muſt be againſt that *noble faculty*, which is our chief dignity, and only ſuperiority to the animal creation. And we are to conſider farther, that the *real nature* of things is not, in the leaſt, altered by our erroneous ſentiments, or irregular behaviour; and that, if we would form

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SERM. VI. a right judgment in any caſe, we muſt carefully diſtinguiſh between the *natural tendency* of a principle, and the evils it may *occaſionally* produce, through the ignorance, prejudice, and wilful perverſeneſs of mankind.

Thus, for inſtance, 'tis generally allowed, that *religion* is not, in itſelf, ever the leſs *amiable* or *uſeful*, for having been ſo horribly corrupted and deformed, as to make it queſtionable, whether under ſome of the worſt *depravations* of it, it has not been quite as bad as no religion at all. The matter of fact is unconteſtable. It has been placed in *faith* and *outward profeſſion*, in *idle ridiculous* ceremonies, *abſurd* and *unintelligible* doctrines, in a *ſlaviſh ſubmiſſion* to the dictates of cunning and deſigning men, and even in ſuch a *blind raging* and *injurious* zeal, as has prompted bigots and enthuſiaſts, of all parties, to violate the great laws of juſtice and charity, which are of eternal and neceſſary obligation. Thus, inſtead of being repreſented as a *reaſonable ſervice*, it has been

been taught, in effect, that we muſt become *brutes*, and renounce our *underſtandings*, in order to be religious; and that we muſt throw off humanity, all regard to the immutable differences of things, and the moral perfections of our maker, in order to ſerve him *acceptably*. SERM. VI.

In like manner, tho' the exerciſe of free enquiry in matters of religion has been groſsly and ſhamefully abus'd, we ought not, upon this account, to entertain the *worſe* opinion of the principle itſelf, becauſe it is, indeed, the chief glory of our nature, and the very end for which we were endued with reaſon. For if the great Creator had deſigned that we ſhould ſubmit *implicitly* to eſtabliſhed opinions, without examining and judging for our ſelves, reaſon muſt not only be *impertinent* and *uſeleſs*, but an *abſurdity* and a *contradiction*; ſince if we make any uſe of this faculty, and follow its moſt plain and natural directions, we can't ſuffer ourſelves to be *thus impoſed on*. Again,

freedom

SERM. VI. freedom of thought, and an honeſt impartial examination into the nature and evidence of religious principles, is abſolutely eſſential to a *rational* faith. For there can no more be true faith without *evidence*, than there can without *ideas*; or in other words, men deſerve no more to be commended for believing an *intelligible* propoſition they know not *why*, than they do for believing what they know *nothing at all* of; from whence it follows, that this liberty of judging for themſelves is one of the moſt *ſacred* and *unalienable* rights of mankind. To this we may add, that the exerciſe of it, in the *utmoſt latitude* of rational enquiry, without any corrupt prejudice to biaſs and miſlead the underſtanding, any undue reverence of human authority, or attachment to party ſchemes, and indeed being influenced by nothing but plain reaſon and ſcripture, is the *only way* in which

truth

truth can revive; whereas without it, men muſt *neceſſarily* continue in their *errors* and *vices*, and there will not be ſo much as *a poſſibility* of a reformation. Accordingly, in proportion as it has prevail'd, it has been of vaſt ſervice to the cauſe of Chriſtianity, by repreſenting its doctrines in a more *conſiſtent* view, and eſtabliſhing its authority upon the *ſtrongeſt* and moſt *unexceptionable* evidence. And withal 'tis a principle the moſt *honourable* that can be to our holy religion, deſcribing it as recommending to men, with an openneſs and frankneſs *peculiar* to *truth*, the uſe and improvement of their rational faculties; and not only *inviting to*, but *encouraging* the utmoſt freedom of debate; becauſe, as it has a good foundation to ſupport it, it can ſtand the teſt of *ſober* and *impartial* reaſon, and receive no *real injury* by all the skill and ſophiſtry of its oppoſers. But what a *diſagreeable* and *unworthy* notion does it give of Chriſtianity, to repreſent it as raiſing its triumphs upon the *ruins* of our rational nature, and

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placing the ſubſtance of religion in *enthuſiaſm* and *implicit faith*; and, conſequently, as ſetting itſelf upon a level with *impoſtures* and *falſe religions*, which will not bear the light, and therefore always ſhelter themſelves under the covert of ignorance and darkneſs.

Since then this principle is the *ſupreme prerogative* of our intelligent being, eſſential to all *rational* religion, and, in a peculiar manner, honourable and advantageous to the *Chriſtian*; let us, notwithſtanding *accidental abuſes* (to which the beſt things are liable) conſtantly aſſert and vindicate it. And let us be ſure ever to remember, that tho' we are *called to liberty*, both theſe rules have the ſame foundation in *reaſon*, and are of equal authority in the *Chriſtian revelation*, *Stand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made* you *free*; *but uſe not* your *liberty for an occaſion to the fleſh.*

SERMON

SERMON VII.

Of Myſteries.

DEUTER. xxix. 29.

The ſecret things belong *unto the Lord our God; but thoſe things which are reveal'd* belong *unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

IN the beginning of this chapter, *Moſes* exhorts the *Iſraelites* to be faithful to God, and conſtant in their obedience to his law, as the way to engage

SERM. VII. the protection of providence, and make them a proſperous and flouriſhing people. He, afterwards, denounces very ſevere judgments againſt them, if they revolted from the ſervice of the true God, and imitated the corruption and wickedneſs of idolatrous nations; judgments in which the divine power and vengeance would be remarkably viſible; ſo *exemplary* and *terrible*, that *all nations* ſhould enquire into the cauſe of them,

Ver. 24. and *ſay*, *Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what* meaneth *the heat of this great anger?* To which it might be anſwered, that the reaſon why they were puniſhed in ſo *ſignal* a manner was, that their iniquities were exceedingly aggravated; that they had ſinned againſt a clear revelation of the will of God, and renounc'd their allegiance and duty to him, notwithſtanding they were favoured with extraordinary and peculiar privileges: *They have forſaken the covenant of the* LORD *God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the*

the land of Egypt. *For they went and* SERM.
ſerved other Gods, and worſhipp'd them; VII.
Gods whom they knew not.——And the anger
of the LORD was kindled againſt this land,
to bring upon it all the curſes that are writ-
ten in this book. And the Lord rooted them
out of their land in anger, and in wrath,
and in great indignation, and caſt them
into another land, as it is *this day.* But Ver. 15—26.
becauſe it might be ask'd farther, why he interpos'd to bring ſuch grievous calamity and deſtruction upon them, while he ſpared other very *corrupt, idolatrous,* and *wicked* nations, 'tis added in the words of the text, that we are not able, in innumerable caſes, to fix the *preciſe reaſons* of the divine conduct, and therefore ſhould not *perplex* and *bewilder* our ſelves with fruitleſs enquiries of this kind; *The ſecret things belong unto the LORD our God,* &c.

A very learned commentator ſuppoſes, *M.* Le Clerc. that there might be another queſtion ſtarted (beſides that mentioned in the 24th verſe) of which we have no particular account, *viz.* Whether the *Iſraelites* would ever, in fact, become thus

SERM. VII. degenerate, and bring themſelves, by their guilt, into ſuch deplorable and dreadful circumſtances; and that *Moſes*, in the text, checks this *idle inquiſitive* humour, which makes men anxious about futurity, and to be acquainted with events that don't concern them. But theſe things are not of much importance; for if we ſhould not be able to fix to what it immediately refers, the text has, in general, an eaſy and obvious ſenſe, and naturally ſuggeſts ſeveral uſeful things to be the ſubject of the enſuing diſcourſe. As,

I. That 'tis a *vain* and *fooliſh curioſity* to enquire into things that we can't comprehend, and with reſpect to which we have no light to direct us, either from reaſon, or revelation.

II. That there are, *properly* ſpeaking, *no myſteries* in religion. *The ſecret things belong unto the LORD our God*, and only *things reveal'd*, things that are plain and intelligible, *belong to us.*

III. That

III. That the great end of revelation is *practice*, the practice of ſolid and ſubſtantial virtue; *that we may do all the words of this law.* From whence it neceſſarily follows, SERM. VII.

IV. That no doctrines which, in the leaſt, encourage *immorality*, can be parts of a divine revelation. And in the

Fifth and laſt place, that the *importance* of the ſeveral doctrines of revelation is to be judged of by this rule, *viz.* their tendency to promote and eſtabliſh a becoming regard to *purity* and *true goodneſs.*

I. 'Tis a *vain* and *fooliſh curioſity* to enquire into things that we can't comprehend, and with reſpect to which we have no light to direct us, either from reaſon, or revelation. Of this kind are the *ſecret counſels* and *decrees* of God, and *future events* in which we have no manner of concern. There are many truths that are neceſſarily hid from us, and wrapp'd up in cloſe *impenetrable* darkneſs. Such is the narrowneſs and

SERM. VII. limitation of our preſent faculties, that we are ignorant of the ends and uſes of innumerable things in the *conſtitution* of *nature*; and particular events in the *conduct* of *providence* confound and puzzle us, becauſe we have but very looſe and imperfect conceptions of its whole deſign. And yet the *pride* of man would graſp at every thing. It ſets itſelf to judge, or rather to make childiſh and groundleſs *conjectures* where it knows nothing; takes it amiſs that the All-wiſe creator has not condeſcended to reveal to it all his *ſecrets*; and can't perſuade itſelf to uſe and improve the knowledge it *has*, for the uneaſineſs it feels, and its impatient and eager deſire after what it *has not*. Such a temper as this is very *perverſe* and *unreaſonable*. For 'tis certainly the *true wiſdom* of mankind (as there are bounds ſet to the human underſtanding, beyond which it cannot paſs) to purſue thoſe truths which are within the reach of their faculties, and digeſt and cultivate that uſeful knowledge which is of the higheſt importance to them, and to be thankful that their rational powers are of

ſo

ſo large a compaſs and extent; and moſt *unaccountable folly* to delight to grope in the dark, to leave the plain dictates of reaſon, and follow the wild rovings of imagination and fancy, to attempt to argue where they have no principles to proceed upon, and unravel inexplicable myſteries, and to repine at not being omniſcient, or able to comprehend all the deſigns of an infinite mind. SERM. VII.

Our bleſſed Saviour diſcourag'd this idle trifling curioſity upon all occaſions, and very wiſely; becauſe it naturally leads to *ſcepticiſm* and *cavilling*, and diverts the mind from a purſuit of ſolid wiſdom, to *amuſing* and *uſeleſs* ſpeculations. Thus when one (who was only concern'd in the ſolution of that grand queſtion, what HE ſhould *do to be ſav'd*) came and enquired of him, *Lord, are there few that be ſav'd!* inſtead of giving a direct anſwer, which would have humoured this ſpirit of *impertinence*, he inſtructed the multitude what was their proper buſineſs, and moſt important intereſt: *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate, for many will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not* Luke viii. 23, 24.

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not be able. Other inſtances might be alledged to the ſame purpoſe, but this is ſufficient to ſhow, that, in the judgment of this divine teacher, ſuch enquiries were vain and unprofitable, and argued a *light unſteddy* temper, and a mind intent upon *trifles*, inſtead of being deſirous of that uſeful knowledge which is ſuited to its faculties, and has an immediate influence upon its happineſs. Let it therefore be our chief care to make a right improvement of what we do know, of the plain directions of our reaſon, and the extraordinary light that is afforded us by divine revelation; and let us not aſpire after things out of our reach, and ſo neglect the ſubſtance, and hunt after ſhadows. Let us upon the evidences we have (which are very numerous and unconteſtable, and of the utmoſt force with every conſiderate mind) let us, I ſay, upon the evidences we have of the unerring wiſdom, inflexible juſtice, and moſt perfect goodneſs of the great author and governor of the univerſe, acquieſce, without murmuring, in all his diſpoſals, and entertain an honourable opinion of all the methods

methods of his providence. In this our reaſon will *aſſiſt* us; ſo far the inference is *eaſy* and *natural.* But in attempting to account for every thing, and trace out the whole ſcheme of God's providential operations, we aſſume a task that is far above our *capacities*, and *diſquiet* ourſelves *in vain.* We may *imagine*, and *gueſs*, and indulge a thouſand little groundleſs *fancies*, but ſhall find it impracticable, in numberleſs caſes, to form *juſt* and *certain* concluſions. SERM. VII.

The 2*d* obſervation from the text is, that there are, properly ſpeaking, *no myſteries* in religion. *The ſecret*, i. e. the myſterious *things*, belong *unto the LORD our God*; and only *things reveal'd*, things that are plain and intelligible, belong *to us.* A *myſtery*, in the ſcripture ſenſe of it, is a thing that natural reaſon could not diſcover, and, conſequently, which muſt have been unknown, if God had not reveal'd it. And of this kind, I own, there are ſeveral doctrines in the Chriſtian religion; before the revelation was given they were myſteries; but ceaſe to be myſteries now they are reveal'd. Accordingly

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Mark iv. 11. Rom. xvi. 25. 1 Cor. xv. 51.

ly Chriſt ſays to his diſciples, that unto them it was *given* to know the myſtery *of the kingdom of God.* Again, St. *Paul* ſpeaks of *the* revelation of the myſtery *which was kept ſecret ſince the world began*; and to the *Corinthians, Behold I* ſhew *you a myſtery.* All which paſſages evidently imply, that how dark ſoever theſe things were before, they are now plain and intelligible, how elſe could they be *ſhewn, reveal'd,* and *known?* And this will appear more undeniably, if we conſider the things themſelves. For what can be more clear than the two *myſteries* St. *Paul* ſpeaks of, *viz.* preaching the goſpel to the *Gentiles*; and this propoſition, *We ſhall not all ſleep,* or die, *but we ſhall all,* i. e. thoſe who are found alive at the coming of Chriſt, *be chang'd?* They could not have been known if they had not been reveal'd, and, conſequently, before that time were *proper myſteries*; but, in themſelves, are *plain truths* adapted to all underſtandings, and have not the leaſt *obſcurity* or *intricacy* in them. The ſame may be ſaid of the *parable* of the *ſower,* which our ſaviour refers to,

it was *a myſtery of the kingdom of God*, while it was conceal'd and hid under a dark parable; but afterwards ſo clear, that no man of common reflection could find any difficulty in it. SERM. VII.

Now from this account 'tis moſt certain, that *myſteries*, i. e. things which reaſon cannot diſcover, and which are not reveal'd, are, in the language of the text, *the ſecret things* that *belong to God*, and what we have nothing at all to do with; or, in other words, tho certain things are parts of our religion that *were* myſteries, 'tis not our duty to believe or practiſe any thing that is *ſtill* a myſtery. To believe doctrines that are *ſtill* myſterious is to believe without *ideas*, to believe what we know nothing of; but this, in the nature of the thing, is *impoſſible*. We may, indeed, believe that there is *ſome general truth* contain'd in propoſitions which we don't underſtand, and ſo far our faith may be rational, becauſe we know what we believe; but of the propoſitions themſelves we can believe nothing *particularly*, becauſe we underſtand nothing: Nor can greater diſhonour be done to the infinite wiſdom

SERM. VII. wiſdom of God, than by ſuppoſing, that he has made it a part of our religious obligations only to believe, in general, that there is ſome truth diſguis'd under unintelligible terms, to which we have no ideas. For this is making no *revelation* at all, but leaving things in abſolute *darkneſs*; 'tis only ſhewing men their own ignorance, and perhaps may be look'd upon as upbraiding and inſulting them with it, but affords no light by which they may be directed to their duty and happineſs.

And if we examine the doctrines of the Chriſtian religion, we ſhall find in fact, that they are plain and eaſy truths, and that as we cannot in *reaſon*, we are not oblig'd by *revelation*, to carry our faith one jot beyond our underſtanding.—— "That God made, and ſupports and "governs the world, that he is eter- "nal, independent, unchangeable, per- "fectly wiſe, juſt and good;" which are fundamental truths of natural religion, explain'd and enforc'd by chriſtianity; "that he ſent his ſon into the world to "be the inſtructor and ſaviour of man- "kind,

" kind, that he has made him *Lord of* SERM.
" *all*, and *will*, by him, *judge the world* VII.
" *in righteouſneſs*, that all men ſhall be
" rais'd at the great day with immortal
" and incorruptible bodies, the righte-
" ous be rewarded with *eternal life*, and
" the wicked puniſh'd with *everlaſting*
" *deſtruction*;" theſe, likewiſe, which are the peculiar principles of the goſpel, have nothing *abſtruſe* and *myſterious* in them, but are expreſs'd in the moſt *natural* and *obvious* terms. If you ſay, that you can't account for the *manner* of God's creating the world, or for the *manner* in which he exiſts every where, of the general reſurrection, and the like, I anſwer, 'tis no part of your *religion* to account for it.——Where the myſtery *begins*, religion *ends*.——For I would ask, does the moſt warm and forward *enthuſiaſt* pretend to believe more than that theſe things are true? Does he believe any thing at all with reſpect to the *manner* of them? Nay, is not his urging that 'tis myſterious and incomprehenſible a demonſtration, that he, *himſelf*, knows, he

SERM. VII. he can believe nothing *particularly* about it?

'Tis yet more ſtrange to talk of *myſterious precepts*, than of unintelligible doctrines; for laws that are not *underſtood*, 'tis moſt certain, can never be obey'd. What is deſign'd for a rule of action ſhould be as plain as poſſible, and if it be intended for an univerſal rule, it muſt be adapted to the *loweſt capacities* of mankind; and the enjoining *incomprehenſible* is the very ſame abſurdity, and the ſame degree of injuſtice, as enjoining *impracticable* duties. Should it be ask'd, whether God may not command things, which we can't aſſign particular reaſons for? I anſwer, that I very much queſtion whether any of this kind can be produced from revelation; but if it could, the *command itſelf* would be no myſtery, for then 'tis impoſſible it ſhould be obſerv'd, it would, in truth, be a command to *do nothing*; but the only myſtery would be, *why God gave ſuch a command*, which your religion has no manner of concern with.

'Tis indeed very ſurprizing, that mankind, in all ages, have been ſo *fond* of myſteries.

myſteries. That the *crafty* and *deſigning*, who make a gain of the credulity of the multitude, ſhould uſe all their art and intereſt to propagate them, is indeed natural enough; but why ſhould the more *honeſt* and *diſintereſted* part of the people plead ſo zealouſly for them? Whence comes it to paſs, that when they chooſe to ſee their way plain before them in all other caſes, they ſhould affect to be *without light* in matters of religion? Religion is of vaſtly greater importance than the common affairs of life, and this they readily acknowledge; and yet they ſeem to like it the *better*, the *leſs* they underſtand it. Such a conduct is very unaccountable, becauſe there can, one would think, be no motive to it.——Myſteries yield neither *pleaſure* nor *profit*.——For as, with reſpect to the works of *nature*, all our pleaſure ariſes from the *perception* of beauty, harmony, and uſefulneſs, and however we may imagine innumerable *ſecret* beauties which we have not diſcover'd, yet till they are *known* they afford no *real ſatisfaction*, nor can we reap any *advantage* from them; 'tis juſt the SERM. VII.

SERM. VII. ſame with reſpect to *myſteries* in *religion*, we can neither be delighted nor *profited* by them becauſe we don't underſtand them, *i. e.* in other words they are really *nothing at all* to us.——Nay we can't ſo much as *admire* them, becauſe admiration neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that we have a knowledge of the *grandeur*, or of the *worth* and *excellency* of the object. The utmoſt that can be ſaid therefore is, that we are *confounded* and *puzzled.*——And is there any pleaſure in that, or any advantage merely in being in the *dark*, and having *no ideas?*

However, if this were all, a man would only prove himſelf a *weak* (and might at the ſame time be an *innocent*) enthuſiaſt, by ſuppoſing things that are, in truth, *nothing* to him, to be important parts of revelation. But when *myſteries* are propagated with zeal, and impos'd on conſcience, when for the ſake of what is allow'd to be *incomprehenſible*, the plain and indiſpenſable obligations of juſtice and charity are infring'd and violated (of which the hiſtory of the Chriſtian church, in almoſt every age, affords many flagrant examples)

examples) 'tis then our duty to oppoſe an error which makes *religion* contemptible, and ſtrikes at the foundation of *Chriſtianity*, and, indeed, of all *good morals*. And this can't be ſo effectually done as by ſhewing that there are no myſteries in religion, and that of what we don't underſtand, we can't know whether it be good for any thing or no: 'tis in fact uſeleſs, and does not deſerve our zeal; nor if we did underſtand it would that alone be ſufficient, unleſs it was a doctrine of ſome importance to the cauſe of virtue, and the happineſs of mankind, and conſequently worthy of God. I ſhall only add, that there is a great difference between a *myſtery*, and a direct *abſurdity* and *contradiction*, ſuch as *tranſubſtantiation*, and *other doctrines* which have been ſcreen'd under that more venerable name; for myſteries are only things that we know *nothing at all* of, the other things that we certainly know to be *falſe*;——the former we only *don't* underſtand, the latter we ſee *can't* be underſtood. But I proceed to

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The 3*d* obſervation, *viz.* that the great end of revelation is *practice*; the practice of ſolid and ſubſtantial virtue. *Thoſe things which are reveal'd*, ſays *Moſes*, belong *to us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.* The deſign of revelation, I have already ſhewn, could not be to *confound* the underſtandings of men with *deep* and *inexplicable* myſteries; for this, inſtead of giving a revelation to aſſiſt and inſtruct mankind, is only to bewilder them, and lead them into a maze; and it muſt be abſolutely unbecoming the infinite wiſdom of God, to be at the expence of miracles, and ſending an extraordinary meſſenger from heaven, merely to *nonplus* and *puzzle* human reaſon, and make ignorant men *ſtare*. Again, it can't be thought to be the ſole and ultimate view of revelation, to give right ſpeculative notions of the moſt important principles, or furniſh the underſtanding with juſt ideas even of *moral* truths; for what does the moſt excellent kind of knowledge ſignify if it be not digeſted, and reduced to its proper uſe? or how is it at all more valuable

valuable than *harmleſs error*, and a *pleaſing delufion*? Beſides, men may be great proficients in the *theory* of religion, may underſtand it thoroughly, and be able to argue every part of it with an uncommon *acuteneſs*, and *ſtrength* of judgment, and be not at all the wiſer or the better for it; they may, notwithſtanding, be very *miſerable* in themſelves and *injurious* to others: For even *the devils believe and tremble.* James ii. 19. But to aim at promoting and encouraging the practice of virtue by a revelation, the practice, I ſay, of univerſal, generous, and godlike virtue, which is the perfection of human nature, and inſeparably connected both with private and public happineſs, is a truly *noble* deſign, worthy the *greateſt* and *beſt* of characters, even that of the All-wiſe governour, the ſupremely beneficent and compaſſionate father of mankind. And that this is really the great end propoſed by the Chriſtian revelation, muſt be allowed by all who have examin'd it with any care, and will be ſeen the more clearly, the more thoroughly it is underſtood. SERM. VII.

The greateſt part of Chriſtianity is only *a reinforcement* of the *religion of nature*,

SERM. VII. *ture*, conſiſting of *moral* precepts which were doubtleſs intended to be the rule of our actions, and ſtrengthening the arguments for a virtuous life which *reaſon* ſuggeſts. And if we conſider its *peculiar* doctrines, we ſhall find that they are all calculated, wiſely calculated to ſerve the ſame moſt excellent deſign of eſtabliſhing moral obligations, and promoting univerſal purity. This, for inſtance, is the deſign of the *death* of Chriſt, and the *redemption* purchas'd for us *by his blood*; for Tit. ii. 14. he *gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works*: ——of his *reſurrection*, and the hope that is thereby afforded us of a glorious reſurrection to life and immortality; for if we Col. iii. 1. are *riſen with Chriſt*, we ought *to ſeek thoſe things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth at the right hand of God*; and to Phil. iii. 20, 21. have *our converſation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall change our vile body, that it may be faſhion'd like unto his glorious body.*——Again, the natural influence, and, conſequently, the ultimate end of the *promiſes* of the goſpel is, *that by*

by them we may be partakers of a divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust. Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.——And to mention no more, do we believe the doctrine of the *universal* judgment? *When the Lord Jesus shall be reveal'd from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel;*——*and when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admir'd in all them that believe?*——*What manner of persons ought we,* then, *to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* Is it not a most natural and forcible conclusion, that *seeing* we *look for such things, we should be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless?*

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2 Pet. i. 4. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

2 Thes. i. 7—10.

2 Pet. iii. 11.

Ver. 14.

And this, which must be the view of all divine revelations, and which the grand doctrines of Christianity have a peculiar tendency to promote, is besides expressly declar'd to be its chief design. All hopes of happiness, but what are built on *purity of heart* and *a virtuous life*, are,

SERM. VII. according to the Chriſtian ſcheme, vain and deluſory, and will certainly end in diſappointment and confuſion.——Doſt thou expect to be ſaved by thy faith and outward profeſſion? Hear what Chriſt himſelf ſays, *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven. What doth it profit, my brethren,* ſaith St. *James, tho' a man ſay he hath faith, and have not works, can faith ſave him? If a brother or ſiſter be naked, and deſtitute of daily food, and one of you ſay unto them depart in peace, be ye warm'd, and fill'd, notwithſtanding ye give them not thoſe things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? even ſo faith if it hath not works, is dead being alone.*——Or doſt thou expect to be rewarded for a ſtrong, warm and lively zeal? *Tho'* thou *give* thy *body to be burned, and haſt not charity, it profiteth nothing.*——Church privileges are a vain ſecurity;—Nay, the outward appearance of ſome uncommon virtue, and even extraordinary gifts will not avail: For *tho' I ſpeak with the tongues of men and angels, tho' I have the gift of prophecy, and underſtand*

Mat. vii. 21.

James ii. 14—17.

1 Cor. xiii. 3.

1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

derstand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and *tho' I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, I am nothing.* *Many,* says our blessed saviour, *will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?* St. *Luke* adds; *we have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* With these things exactly agree the general accounts we have of religion in the writings of the New Testament: *The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*——*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life?*——*Pure religion and undefil'd before God, even the father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*——So that the sum of religion, under the gospel, is the same with what is very elegantly and strongly express'd by the prophet *Micah, He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what*

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Mat. vii. 22, 23.

Luke xiii. 26.

1 Cor. vi. 9. Rev. xxii. 14.

James i. 27.

Mic. vi. 8

SERM. VII. *doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* From this, head, *viz.* that the great end of revelation is *practice*, the practice of ſolid and ſubſtantial virtue, it neceſſary follows,

4. That no doctrines, which in the leaſt incourage *immorality*, can be parts of a divine revelation.——Doctrines of this kind can't be charg'd on chriſtianity, which preſcribes the nobleſt ſyſtem of morals, without making it contradict itſelf.—— Nor, in the nature of the thing, can they belong to any religion that is of divine original, becauſe of the abſolute wiſdom, and ſpotleſs purity of the great governor of the world.—Even miracles themſelves can't prove ſuch doctrines to be true, which are *neceſſarily* falſe, diſhonourable to the moral attributes of God, and inconſiſtent with the true perfection and happineſs of mankind. But this point is ſo exceeding clear that I need not enlarge on it; and therefore,

In the laſt place, if the great end of revelation be to promote a good life, it is an undeniable conſequence, that the importance of the ſeveral doctrines of it muſt be

be judged of by this rule, *viz.* their tendency to eſtabliſh a becoming regard to purity and virtue.—And let any man ask himſelf ſeriouſly what thoſe doctrines are; whether they are not thoſe *plain principles* in which all good Chriſtians are agreed; and whether the moſt *celebrated controverſies*, which have produced ſo much confuſion and violence in the Chriſtian world, have not been about ſuch things, as have very *little*, if *any* connection with practical religion?—Let him ask himſelf of what uſe are diſputes about *perſonalities*, *ſubſiſtences*, the *hypoſtatical union*, and other famous points which diſtract the minds of the vulgar; and which the *learned* themſelves can't tell how to explain.—The ſcripture has none of theſe *dark* phraſes, but is a *plain intelligible* rule. Let us therefore ſtudy *that* more, and *ſcholaſtic explications* of it leſs, which have, in many places, darkened the text, and *made* difficulties where they *found* none. And let us value our brethren, not for being of the ſame ſide with us in matter of *doubtful opinion*, and the *ſubtilties* of *controverſial divinity*, but for their *piety*, *juſtice*, *charity*, and the fruits of *univerſal righteouſneſs*

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SERM. VII. *righteousness* that appear in their conversations. I shall conclude this discourse with two passages of scripture. The one is from St. *Paul*'s first epistle to *Timothy*:

1 Tim. vi. 3—5. *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesom words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing; but doating about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness. From such withdraw thyself.* The other are the words of St. *James*:

James i. 22—25. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth* therein, *he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

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SERMON VIII.

Agur's prayer; or the middle condition of life, generally, the moſt eligible.

PROV. xxx. Part of the 8th, and the whole 9th verſe.

--- *Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: leſt I be full and deny* thee, *and ſay, who* is *the Lord? or leaſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the name of my God* in vain.

THESE Words (as we are informed in the firſt verſe of the chapter) were ſpoken by *Agur* to *Ithiel* and *Ucal*, who, very probably, were two of his Scholars, that

 came

SERM. VIII. came to him to be instructed in the principles of true wisdom. He begins with modestly declaring his own insufficiency for so great an undertaking, and recommends as the foundation of all useful knowledge, an *humble* Temper of mind, sensible of the natural weakness of human understanding, and the imperfection of its highest improvements; which he argues, verse the 4th, from our ignorance of the works of Nature. And therefore, in the two following verses, he advises his pupils to make it their principal study to understand *the will of God*, which is, of all knowledge, the most important, and of the greatest use in human life; and in all their enquiries of this kind, to confine themselves to what God had *revealed*. Then he introduces the words of the text, in the form of an address to God, in answer, perhaps, to some question that they had propos'd to him about the duty of prayer: *Two things have I required of thee: Deny me them not, before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient*

nient for me, (i. e. Allow me only to enjoy such a competency, as will enable me to live with decency and advantage to my fellow creatures, in that station in which I am placed,) *least I be full and deny* thee, *and say who* is *the Lord? or least I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God* in vain. SERM. VIII.

In this passage 'tis plainly intimated, that the *middle* state of life is, generally at least, more safe and eligible than either *want* or *superfluity*. With respect to its being better than *narrow* and *penurious* circumstances, there can be no dispute; but that it should be preferr'd to great *wealth* and *abundance* will, I am perswaded, appear a very wild and extravagant paradox to the giddy and unthinking, who judge of things at first Sight, without enquiring into their nature, or considering their consequences. For is it not a desireable thing, will such say, to be not only placed above poverty, and enjoy the necessaries and conveniencies, but the *delights* also of human life? —— to be persons of *figure*, *power*, and *influence*? —— and, consequently, capable of serving our

SERM. VIII. friends, and relieving the indigent and miſerable, in a more *large* and *extenſive* degree? —— Can a condition, which may not only be ſo agreeable, but uſeful, be *miſchievous* and *deſtructive* to mankind? It certainly may; nay, it actually has had this fatal conſequence in many caſes. And perſons who have behaved with honour, and an unblemiſhed reputation in *moderate* circumſtances; nay, who have preſerved their virtue, and manifeſted great preſence and ſtrength of mind, under the buffettings of *adverſe* fortune; have been captivated and bewitched by the charms of an *affluent proſperity*, and the pleaſures it brings along with it, and ſunk into an indolent and diſſolute life. Which ſhows us that there is not only *danger*, but *eminent* and *peculiar* danger in it, when it happens to ſome particular tempers; and in general, where there is not a lively *influence* of *religion* and *virtue*, and *firmneſs* and *reſolution* of mind. But I proceed to conſider the Words of the text more particularly, in the following method.

I. I

I. I ſhall endeavour to explain and illuſtrate what it ſays concerning the danger of a ſtate of great *riches* and *ſuperfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other; from whence it will clearly appear, that the *middle* condition is in *general*, and, except to ſome *rare* and *peculiar* tempers, the moſt convenient and eligible. And SERM. VIII.

II. Make ſome remarks upon this doctrine to prevent *miſtakes* that may ariſe from it, and direct to the right *uſe* and *improvement* of it.

1*ſt.* I am to explain and illuſtrate what the text ſays concerning the danger of a ſtate of great *riches* and *ſuperfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other. I ſhall take them juſt in the order in which it repreſents them to us. And

1*ſt.* For the danger that attends a ſtate of great *riches* and *ſuperfluity*, which is expreſs'd thus, *leaſt I be full and deny* thee, *and ſay who* is *the Lord?* To deny God ſignifies in ſcripture, ſometimes, to act as if there was no righteous Gover-

SERM. VIII. nour and Judge of Mankind, to whom they are accountable, as well as directly to disown his being and providence. But I can't apprehend this to be the meaning of the phrase here, because, in this large view, there is no more danger of denying God to men in *high* and *flourishing* circumstances, than what *every other state* of life affords, which, has in it equal temptations to vice and immorality. I shall take it therefore in a stricter sense than this, and yet not in the most confined sense of all, and enquire briefly, what peculiar danger there is, arising from *riches* and *plenty*, of "irreligion "and prophaneness, a disregard and con- "tempt of providence, and other crimes "of a like nature, that are committed "more *directly* and *immediately* against "God himself."

And, in general, the fundamental danger of all lies here, that in the height of prosperity, men are apt to be *careless* and *inconsiderate*. Chearfulness, and a relaxation from severer Studies and contemplations, is not only innocent but necessary, in the present mixed and imper-

imperfect ſtate of human nature. But in an affluent proſperity, when every thing about us is gay, and has a ſmiling aſpect, we are too apt to contract an habitual *levity* of mind, and neglect all *grave* and *ſerious* reflections. A continued ſucceſſion of pomp and pleaſure fixes our attention, and diverts it from greater and more important concerns. *Wiſe* men, indeed, who have impartially eſtimated the true worth of things, look upon riches and honours only as ſuperfluities and outward decorations of life, and not as eſſential to human happineſs; and value themſelves upon them no farther, than as they enable them to do greater good to their fellow creatures; but the *fooliſh* and *unthinking* are made giddy by their proſperity. The natural conſequence of which is, that they muſt be an eaſy prey to all the peculiar temptations of their wealthy and exalted ſtate; and it will appear, particularly, from the following conſiderations, that they are in great danger of the vices implied in the text. For SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. *1ſt.* When the mind is thus weakened and diſſolved, and its faculties enervated and broken, when the moderation of men's tempers is deſtroyed, and they are become thoughtleſs and inconſiderate, which the *indolence* and *gaiety*, and *various little trifling entertainments* of a proſperous condition have a natural tendency to effect, 'tis no wonder, if they pride themſelves in their riches, as their ultimate happineſs; and for want of reflecting on the inſtability of all human affairs, think themſelves ſelf ſufficient; and loſe that juſt ſenſe which they ought to have of the ſovereignty of their maker, and their abſolute and neceſſary dependence upon him. 'Tis no wonder at all, if, by being *complimented* and *flattered*, their vanity be raiſed ſo high, as to make them regardleſs of that ſupreme being, from whom all their abundance, honour, and greatneſs flows; nor if any conceived an extraordinary opinion of their own *merit* upon the account of their ſhining circumſtances, they neglect to pay their due homage and worſhip to the Deity, and live unmindful of his benefits

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This is, in effect, to deny not only God's *government of the world*, but his *abſolute perfection*, and conſequently his *being*, 'Tis to deny our *obligations* to him as the author of every thing we enjoy, and his *right* to our ſervices. The language of ſuch a conduct is, *who is the Lord that we ſhould obey his voice?* And that all this diſingenuity and ingratitude towards the greateſt and beſt of beings is a conſequence, that, it may juſtly be feared, will ſpring from riches and greatneſs, when men are *immoderately fond* of them, and, for want of due conſideration, grown *preſumptuous* and *arrogant*, experience abundantly teſtifies. SERM. VIII.

For there are too many, to whom a time of affliction is a ſeaſon of *ſome ſort* of piety, becauſe, then their *ſufferings* put them in mind of their *ſins*, and the hope of deliverance makes them, *to appearance* at leaſt, humble and ſubmiſſive to their maker; but when things go on ſmoothly, and anſwer to the heighth of their wiſhes, they ſeem to think they have no farther *need* of him, and are ſufficient for their own happineſs, without his

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his *interpoſition.* The diſtinguiſhing goodneſs of God, in their continued plenty and abundance, is unheeded, becauſe it is *conſtant* and *uninterrupted.* —— What a *perverſe* creature is man! he wiſhes not to be *miſerable*, and yet forgets the author of his happineſs, becauſe he has not allotted him ſome mixtures of *evil* and *miſery* with it! —— Or rather ſince this is not *human nature*, which abhors ingratitude, but a vile and melancholly *depravation* of it; what will not a man do when proſperity has made him *wanton* and *inſolent*! But further,

2. 'Tis moſt evident, that affluent circumſtances are attended with great temptations to *luxury*, and the immoderate purſuits of *pleaſure*. *Plenty* too naturally begets *exceſs*. It has the *means* of it in its power, *cuſtom* to countenance it, and generally *miniſters of vice* enough at hand to prompt and excite to it. And luxury enfeebles the mind, deſtroys every thing that is great and generous, and indiſpoſes for all rational exerciſes and improvements. It naturally heightens and inflames the *ſenſual* paſſions, and leads to the

the purſuit of *irregular pleaſures.* For what can that man have to reſtrain him from any enjoyment that his inclinations prompt him to, who has *wealth*, *power* and *influence* to command them, and the opportunity, perhaps, of gratifying his corrupt appetites in a *private* manner, ſo as to avoid, in a great meaſure, that ſhame and infamy which juſtly attends it; what, I ſay, can reaſonably be ſuppoſed to reſtrain ſuch a one from indulging his corrupt deſires, if he has no regard to *reaſon*, *conſcience*, and the *authority* of his maker? SERM VIII.

A ſenſe of God, indeed, as the inſpector and dreadful avenger of his wickedneſs, will create great uneaſineſs and confuſion in his mind, and abate his reliſh of unlawful enjoyments. But can we think, that when he is immerſed in ſenſual pleaſures, and given up to vitious purſuits, he will ſuffer his imagination to be continually haunted and ſcared by ſuch *ungrateful truths*, if it be in his power to prevent it? will he not endeavour to root out of his mind thoſe diſagreable *Ideas*, which are a conſtant vexa-

SERM. VIII. vexation and torment to him? So that by his vices, he is neceſſarily prejudic'd in favour of *Atheiſm*, and from wiſhing that there was no God, may come, by degrees, to imagine that there is none; or, at leaſt, which will ſerve the turn of his vitious inclinations and pleaſures full as well, that he does not exerciſe a particular providence over the *moral* world, nor take an account of their conduct. And as the pomp and ſplendour of his greatneſs continually *dazzles* his underſtanding, as the levity of his mind, and the gay amuſements his riches furniſh him with, ſcarce allow him any opportunity for *cloſe* and *ſerious thinking*, and his high ſpirits bear him up againſt *ſudden* and *occaſional reflections*, he has, upon theſe accounts, *a better chance* than another man of being confirmed in his *atheiſtical* ſentiments; and of hindering ſober reaſonings about the being and providence of God, and a judgment to come, from *faſtening* upon him; which, if they were not ſome way or other diverted, muſt make the *ſtouteſt* heart tremble in the midſt of all its carnal delights. I ſay indeed

indeed *a better chance*, becauſe to a man of ſuch a depraved diſpoſition, it appears under that character; but the real truth is, that his affluence and luxury only tend to blind and pervert his judgment the more, and, conſequently to *harden* him in *Atheiſm* and *irreligion*. In the— SERM. VIII.

Third place, If at any time it happens to be the *faſhion* to be *Atheiſtical*, and ſeem to have no ſenſe of religion, the rich and great are, of all others, moſt likely to fall in with it. For 'tis, generally, their prevailing view to recommend themſelves to the approbation of the *polite* world; and therefore we ſee daily, that, in compliance with the *reigning* taſte, they run into dreſſes and cuſtoms that are neither *ornamental* nor *uſeful*, nor perhaps ſo *decent*, as one might expect from perſons of a higher education. And, upon the ſame principle, if it ſhould happen in the preſent age, as it probably did in *Augur*'s time, that a diſregard and contempt of the ſupreme Being, and bantering and ridiculing things ſacred, are reckon'd *genteel* accompliſhments; if religion ſhould be looked upon

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as calculated only for the *populace*; and it ſhould be thought the character of an *ill bred* man, and one that did not *know the world,* to be ſerious in public offices of devotion, or give the leaſt ſuſpicion of ſecret piety; if this, I ſay, ſhould be the caſe, there is great danger that the perſons above mentioned would fall in with the *modiſh* extravagance. They would, probably, think it unbecoming their rank and ſtation in life to be out of the *faſhion*, even in a thing that is ſo contrary to *juſtice*, *honour*, *gratitude*, and the true *intereſt* of mankind. And their temptations to it might be the ſtronger, as their *pride* makes them contemn the ill opinion of the vulgar, and their circumſtances place them above a ſtate of *dependence.*

If it be ſaid, that a diſregard of the Deity, and diſcarding both natural and revealed religion, prevail very much in *middle* life, as well as amongſt perſons of a more *elevated* condition, I anſwer, that this will be found to be no prejudice to the preſent argument; becauſe ſuch, generally ſpeaking, copy after the example of their *ſuperiours*, and are prophane, from

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a ſervile imitation of them, in order to be faſhionable. And juſt in proportion as *luxury*, which is, *originally*, a vice of the great and wealthy, and can't be practis'd with *decency* by perſons of inferior condition, who have not the ſame opportunities for it, and are not able to ſupport it without loſing their credit, and conſuming their ſubſtance; Juſt, I ſay, in proportion as *luxury* and the purſuit of *pleaſure* has abounded, *irreligion*, likewiſe, has gain'd ground, and ſpread itſelf. Thus have I ſhown the temptations, ariſing from *ſuperfluous wealth* and *greatneſs*, to deny God in the *ſtrict* ſenſe of the word, and act with diſreſpect and ingratitude towards his Providence. SERM. VIII.

Suffer me now briefly to mention a few other vices of the moſt malignant and fatal conſequence to mankind, to which it has *peculiar* temptations. And the

Firſt is *pride* and *vanity*. When Men are elated by their diſtinguiſh'd circumſtances, they eaſily fancy themſelves to be very *ſignificant* perſons, and poſſeſs'd of *extraordinary* merit. And this vain opinion, which is continually fed by their

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mercenary dependents and *flatterers* (among whom 'tis ſcarce poſſible for any man to preſerve a juſt opinion of himſelf, and of human nature) diſcovers itſelf in every part of their conduct, and in all their appearances. Not but that it may be very innocent and rational for perſons of *figure* and *ſubſtance* to allow themſelves ſuch diverſions, and make ſuch an appearance in public, as would be very improper and criminal in thoſe who enjoy but *moderate fortunes*; nor would I be ſuppoſed to condemn that external ſhew and magnificence, which is a badge of *civil* honour, and neceſſary to diſtinguiſh the ſeveral ranks of men one from another, or maintain the reſpect due to their different characters. But for any to pride themſelves, and fancy that there is a *proper merit* in dreſs and equipage, or in the prodigality and glittering pomp of greatneſs, is a vice that argues a very *low* and *degenerate* turn of mind; and whenever ſuch a temper prevails, it will take men off from improving in thoſe moral diſpoſitions and habits, which alone conſtitute

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true greatneſs, and are the only *real excel-* SERM.
lency of a reaſonable being. VIII.

Farther, riches miniſter to *ambition*, which is one of the moſt irregular paſſions of human nature, and attended with the moſt miſchievous effects. And in proportion to our *vanity*, and the *high views* we entertain for our ſelves, they have a tendency to beget in us an unbecoming and inſolent *contempt* of others. For men are apt to think, that there is ſo much reſpect due to their ſuperior circumſtances, as if they were of a *different nature* from their fellow creatures, and originally formed in a *higher order* of being; and thus they ſacrifice all the rights of mankind, reſulting from their *natural equality*, to an *accidental* advantage, which has no merit at all in it otherwiſe than as 'tis enjoyned with condeſcention and benevolence, and a ſubſerviency to the general good.

Finally, men are too eaſily tempted,

SERM. VIII. by their riches and power, to be *imperious* and *tyranical*, and to abuſe thoſe great talents, which God hath put into their hands for the good of others, to opereſſion and injuſtice; by which means they moſt wickedly pervert the wiſe ſcheme of providence, and are more *extenſively* miſchievous and hurtful, in proportion to their *greater capacity* for doing good. I now proceed

2. To conſider what the text ſays concerning the danger of a ſtate of *want* and *poverty*; *or leaſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the name of my God* in vain. The vices, to which ſtrait and penurious circumſtances of life are here repreſented as having peculiar temptations, are *theft*, and *taking the name of God* in vain, by which is moſt probably meant *perjury*. And 'tis very evident, that the temptation to theſe crimes is, in the nature of the thing, much ſtronger, when perſons are embarraſſed with difficulties, and oppreſſed by poverty, than it can be when they

they enjoy a superfluity of riches, or even a moderate fortune, which is sufficient to procure for them all necessaries, and proper conveniences, and places them above care and anxiety. And as it appears likewise, in fact, that the guilty this way are most frequently necessitous people, who have either no employment to follow, or else had rather violate the most sacred obligations of conscience, than be forced to maintain themselves by honest labour; I shall say no more to this point directly, but enquire into the causes why the poor so easily give way to temptations of this kind. And, SERM. VIII.

1. 'Tis undoubtedly owing, in a great measure, to the want of *a good education.* The advantage of this is unspeakable; and nothing has a larger share in forming the difference there is between one man and another, tho' *originally* of the same species of beings. 'Tis this that distinguishes the *politer* parts of the world from the most *ignorant* and *barbarous*

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barous nations. For all mankind have the *faculty* of reaſon implanted in them by the great Creator; but if it be not *improved*, it will never ſhew it ſelf to advantage. By good culture it may be raiſed to a ſtate of great *maturity* and *perfection*; but if it be neglected, it will be overrun with *ignorance* and *prejudice*. Again, all men have *a natural power* to diſcern the difference between good and evil, and the ſolid grounds and foundations of morality; but, notwithſtanding this, if they are not *taught* and *inſtructed*, their notions will be very imperfect, rude, and confuſed. Now there is this defect, generally, in the education of the *poorer ſort* of people.---- They are train'd up in a brutal ſtupidity.---- No care is taken to inſtill into their minds proper notions of God, and of his providence, of a judgement to come, and the difference between virtue and vice.---- And as they grow up thus *wild*, and with out any *good* principles at leaſt, if they are not corrupted by bad examples, and have not

not imbibed a contempt of all religion, SERM. 'tis no wonder that they are diſſolute and VIII. extravagant in their practice. All which ſhews us the *great uſe*, I might almoſt ſay, *abſolute neceſſity* of a ſober and virtuous education, and of infuſing ſentiments of wiſdom and piety into children in their early years, and at the *firſt dawn of* reaſon. For their minds are then *tender* and *flexible*, free from *prejudice* and *unruly paſſion*, and equally ſuſceptible of *good*, as *bad* impreſſions: And 'tis generally obſerved, that perſons retain ſomewhat of the *tincture* that was given them in their education, all their lives after.

Another reaſon why poverty ſubjects men to the temptations intimated in the text is, that the poor are not trained up regularly to any *employment*, by which they may get an honeſt livelihood; and for want being inured to labour and induſtry, they contract a habit of idleneſs, than which nothing can be more detri-

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mental to ſociety; for it is, indeed, the *parent* of all vices. To this, particularly, it may be aſcribed, that ſo many ſubſiſt by rapin and violence, and by abuſing and plundering their fellow-creatures.

Again, perſons in ſuch low mean circumſtances are often deſtitute of a ſenſe of *ſhame*, and regard to *reputation*, and, conſequently, have loſt one of the ſureſt *guards* of their virtue and integrity, and are eaſily led into the moſt abominable and injurious vices. And this is not only owing to their having never received any notions of decency in their education, but to the *wrong cuſtom* of the world. Poverty its ſelf is look'd upon as an object of contempt; and for a poor man to pretend to have any reputation to loſe, is too often matter of jeſt and ridicule. But this is certainly very *impolitic*, as well as unjuſt; becauſe 'tis for the intereſt of ſociety to encourage *a ſenſe of honour* in every one that has

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a reaſonable nature, whatever his outward circumſtances may be. For it muſt be conſidered, that a regard to reputation, and a ſenſe of ſhame frequently prevail, where the awful notions of a Deity, and a providence, and a future ſtate, have little, or no influence at all. And therefore, if theſe are deſtroy'd, as they generally are in the wretched poor, by one or other, or both the methods abovementioned, and they think they cannot render themſelves more deſpicable by their *wickedneſs*, than they are already on account of their *poverty*; 'tis natural to ſuppoſe, that they may commit ſuch crimes, as they would otherwiſe be *ſhocked* at the thought of. SERM. VIII.

And in this inſenſibility and indifference about the good or ill opinion of the world, in this lazineſs and averſion to labour, in this brutiſh ſtupidity, and thoſe corrupt and vitious ſentiments, which they acquired from their education, they are confirmed by their *wicked aſſo-*

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ciates, perſons, for the moſt part, of the ſame abandon'd principles with themſelves: So that there is ſcarce a poſſibility of being reclaimed, but, on the other hand, 'tis highly probable they will be more and more encouraged and hardned in their Vices.

Let me juſt mention another Vice, that comes under the character of *taking God's Name* in vain, which the poor are notoriouſly guilty of; and that is the practice of *common ſwearing*. To this, I know of no *peculiar* temptation ariſing from their poverty. And it appears, in fact, that there is none; becauſe it is very near, if not altogether, as common among perſons of high rank and circumſtances, to the very great ſcandal of religion, and *their own diſhonour*. For 'tis a ſhameful thing that they ſhould indulge to ſo *vulgar* a vice; a vice, to which there is not the leaſt *temptation*; and which is a *ſenſeleſs*, *inſignificant expletive* in diſcourſe, that adds neither *ſtrength*, nor

nor *beauty*, to it. And if they will not refrain out of reſpect to the great God, who is infinitely their ſuperiour and better, or from a dread of his vengeance; they ought at leaſt, out of *good manners*, to be aſhamed to continue any longer ſuch an *infamous* practice, to the offence of the ſobereſt and wiſeſt of their fellow-creatures, and in defiance of the laws of their Country. I proceed now to the SERM. VIII.

SECOND thing propos'd, *viz*, to ſuggeſt a few uſeful Reflections on what has been advanced in the foregoing Diſcourſe, in order to prevent Miſtakes that may ariſe from it, and direct to the right uſe and improvement of it. And,

The *1ſt* obſervation I would make is, that notwithſtanding what has been ſaid, both *riches* and *poverty* are capable of being improved to the moſt uſeful purpoſes. For in affluent circumſtances, let a man but govern his appetites, and, enjoy

SERM. VIII. enjoy his fortune with diſcretion, and he has the utmoſt advantages for cultivating his mind; —— a freedom from the *cares* of life, and conſequently an *eaſineſs* and *chearfulneſs* of temper, than which nothing is more ſerviceable to us in the purſuit of knowledge; —— leiſure for ſtudy; —— opportunities for conſulting the beſt Books, and converſing with the moſt learned men in all profeſſions, &c. And, beſides, which is much more deſirable, he has it in his power to exerciſe *diffuſive* and *Godlike benevolence*; —— to be the Patron of virtue, to encourage it by his example, and ſupport it by his authority and influence, and to be the kind inſtrument of providence in relieving and comforting his fellow creatures; and for behaving well in ſo *critical* a ſtation, and doing ſo much good to human ſociety, will be entitled to a greater reward. —— And even a ſtate of *poverty*, if it be born with becoming patience and ſubmiſſion to the will of God, may be of great Uſe, as it inures us to *laborious* and *ſelf-denying* virtue,

virtue, to ſtrength and firmneſs of re- SERM.
ſolution; and conſequently prepares for VIII.
various ſervices of great importance to
mankind, which can't be expected from
any, whoſe minds are *relax'd* and *en-*
feebled by a long courſe of indolence
and luxury, ——— who are *unexperienc'd*
in difficulties, and therefore *frighted* at
the proſpect of them.

2. As poverty is attended with ſuch diſadvantages with reſpect to the practice of virtue, we ſhould be excited by this conſideration to *commiſerate* the caſe of the poor, and relieve them according to our abilities, that we may remove, at leaſt in ſome degree, the *temptations* they are under to vice and immorality. But

3. The chief uſe of all, is to moderate our paſſion for riches and greatneſs. Such a ſtation is much more dangerous when perſons are raiſed to it from a *low* condition, or *moderate* fortune, than

to

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to thoſe who have been *bred up* in it. The ſuddenneſs of the change, in one caſe, *ſhocks* men's tempers, and *overſets* their reaſon; whereas, in the other, they having been always accuſtom'd to it, the *impreſſions* it makes are not ſo ſtrong and *ſenſible*. Beſides the deſire of ſuperfluity is not a *natural* deſire; —— all can't have it indulg'd, and therefore ought not to be ſet upon it. They ſhould rather conſider what 'tis proper for perſons in *their circumſtances* to expect, and be contented with that; and not aſpire impatiently and eagerly after every thing, that the irregular cravings of an *inſatiable* appetite may prompt them to. And from what has been ſaid ſo largely in this diſcourſe, concerning the danger that attends worldly proſperity, we may ſee abundant reaſon not to *envy* thoſe who are poſſeſs'd of it. For what is it we envy? —— why perhaps *ignorance*, *Vice*, and *miſery*, under a glittering and pompous appearance. —— The envied circumſtances, which are ſo highly

highly the object of our admiration and desire, may have corrupted the *virtue* of those whom we think happy in the enjoyment of them, and, in consequence, have destroyed their *peace*; so that they may languish amidst all their plenty, and be distracted with innumerable cares; or else may be gay and thoughtless, or given up to riot and luxury. The generality of mankind are such wild and inconsiderate creatures, and examine so little into the nature of things, that *a fine outside* easily deceives them; so that they *love*, and *admire*, and consequently *envy*, they know not what. Whereas, if they would weigh matters impartially, their reason must inform them, that, to some tempers, the *ease*, *laziness*, and *affluence* of prosperity will administer numberless temptations to vice and extravagance; and that, on the contrary, afflictions may be of great use when persons can't be brought to *consideration*, or kept in tolerable *order*, any other way. And in such cases they would

SERM. VIII. would be led to think very differently from what they uſually do, i. e. to look upon the *ſeeming evil* as a *real good*, and on *proſperity* as a *real evil*, notwithſtanding its flattering and deceitful appearances. Beſides did they compare their own *intire* caſe with that of the perſons whom they are ſo apt to envy, they would often find the advantage to be on their own ſide. For the outward gaiety and ſplendor of proſperity, if it has corrupted the hearts and manners of its poſſeſſors, is a great misfortune, in compariſon of *moderate*, nay even of *afflicted* circumſtances of life, joined with a grave and conſiderate mind, regular paſſions, and a virtuous conduct. Add to this, that proſperity, to thoſe eſpecially who envy it in others, is likely to be attended with the moſt miſchievous and deſtructive conſequences. For what is the true object of their envy? Is it the *capacity* thoſe perſons enjoy of doing *more good* to their fellow creatures? No! but the *abundance*

honour

honour, *pomp*, and *luxury* of ſuch a ſtation. And if they are enamour'd of theſe things, there is no ground to hope that they will guard againſt any *faſhionable* exceſſes, or abridge themſelves even of the moſt *unmanly* entertainments of a vain and luxurious age. SERM. VIII.

SERMON IX.

The miſchiefs of ſlaviſh complaiſance and cowardice.

PROV. xxix. 25. former part.

The fear of man bringeth a ſnare.——

THIS wiſely ordered by the Author of our being, that *every paſſion* of the ſoul may not only be of great uſe to us, if its natural deſign and tendency be regularly purſued, but is capable alſo, by being perverted, of cauſing much vexation and miſery to ourſelves, and injury to our fellow creatures: For this is a demonſtra-

SERM. IX. tion, founded in nature, and obvious to the meaneſt capacity, of the neceſſity of *ſelf-government*, and that we ſhould take the utmoſt care to keep all our affections and appetites within thoſe bounds, which the Creator hath preſcribed. Thus, for inſtance, the *deſire* of happineſs, and *averſion* to pain and miſery, which works ſo ſtrongly in all mankind, is evidently, in itſelf, of the higheſt advantage; but if we form wrong notions of the happineſs which we ought ultimately to purſue, and the evils we ſhould chiefly avoid, it will as certainly prove fatal to us. Again, the paſſion of *ſhame*, is an excellent preſervative from baſe and diſhonourable actions, and nothing is a ſtronger guard and ſecurity to our virtue and innocence than this, when regularly exerciſed, and employ'd about proper objects; but a *falſe ſhame*, which is influenced more by the opinions and cuſtoms of men than by the eternal differences of things, *a falſe ſhame* that breaks our ſpirits, and makes ſuch tame cowards of us, that we have not reſolution enough to ſtand up for the honour of God, and the immutable obligations

tions of virtue, nor, conſequently, to aſ- SERM.
ſert and maintain the dignity of our rea- IX.
ſonable nature; this, I ſay, neceſſarily
deſtroys every thing that is praiſe-wor-
thy and generous in us, and muſt betray
us into innumerable errors in practice,
which are not merely inconſiſtent with
integrity, but will render us, to the laſt
degree, *vile* and *contemptible*.

And the ſame may be ſaid of *fear*. While it proceeds upon right principles, and is proportioned to the weight and moment of the evils about which it is converſant, it muſt be calculated to ſerve the moſt beneficial purpoſes, as it warns us where our greateſt danger lyes, and ſtrongly prompts us to avoid it. But the caſe is quite otherwiſe when it forms *imaginary* dangers, and alarms with *falſe* terrors; —when *fancy* or *corrupt paſſion*, and not the reaſon of things is the foundation and root of it;—when we fear *natural* evils, which, under the direction of an all-wiſe providence, may be over-ruled for good, more than *moral*, which tend neceſſarily and invariably to the miſery and ruin of the rational creation; and the cenſures and

SERM. IX. frowns of men, whoſe wiſdom, power, and duration is *confined* and *limited*, more than the diſpleaſure and vengeance of the Almighty and eternal God; for then our fears will infallibly turn us aſide from our duty, and be attended with moſt pernicious conſequences, as for the ſake of avoiding leſſer and comparatively trifling evils, we ſhall run ourſelves upon others that are infinitely more dreadful. Which ſhows us the vaſt importance of looking well to our *principles* of action, and indeed of making this our firſt and chief care; becauſe if the prevailing *principles* of our minds are corrupt and vicious, 'tis, in the nature of things, impoſſible, that our *practice* ſhould be virtuous and regular. Evil principles of action, as long as they are entertained and indulged, as neceſſarily produce a wicked life, as any other cauſes do their *natural* and *immediate* effects; and therefore till they are corrected and altered, 'tis in vain to expect any reformation in the outward conduct. This is the ground of *Solomon*'s obſervation in the text, which

I now proceed to consider more particularly, in the following method: SERM. IX.

I. I shall show what we must understand by *the fear of man.*

II. In what sense it *bringeth a snare.* And,

III. Offer some remedies against it.

I. I am to explain what we must understand by *the fear of man. The fear of man* I take in its largest sense, not only as implying the fear of those positive evils and punishments, which the power and vengeance of man can inflict, but a reverence of human authority, and customs, and a dread of the censures, and reproaches of our fellow creatures. But that I may talk distinctly, and without confusion, upon this subject, it may be proper briefly to show, that this phrase, when it is used, as in the text, in a *criminal sense*, must be understood with some *caution*, and *limitation.* For,

1*st.* There is, undoubtedly, a *reverence* due to *human authority* in all points that do not exceed the just bounds of it, and

SERM. IX. the paying this regard is abſolutely neceſſary to hold the frame of civil ſocieties together, and prevent lawleſs riot and confuſion. In like manner there is a *deference* due to the *innocent cuſtoms* and *uſages* of the world; and ſingularity in ſuch inſtances, in oppoſition to the unanimous opinion of our fellow creatures, can be the effect of nothing but *weakneſs*, or *obſtinacy*. Such a conduct is as *ridiculous*, as the complying, in things morally evil, would be *wicked*. 'Tis alſo utterly inconſiſtent with a *ſocial* ſpirit, or with that temper of mind which is abſolutely neceſſary to anſwer the great end, for which men agreed, at firſt, to enter into ſociety. For the ends of ſociety cannot be ſecured but by mutual condeſcenſion and reſpect, and the compliance and ſubmiſſion of the *minor* part, in things lawful, and which are entirely of a *civil* nature, to the judgment and practice of the *majority*; and 'tis impoſſible but peace and good order muſt be deſtroyed, if all the members of it are *ſtiff* and *untractable*.

Again,

Again, as 'tis natural for every one who loves himself to desire the favour and good opinion of his fellow creatures, and his duty to cultivate and improve it by all *just* and *honourable* methods, because the quiet and convenience of his life, and his usefulness too, depends, in a great measure, on his reputation and character in the world; he cannot help being *afraid* of censure and reproach, and ought to be sollicitous to avoid (if possible) its being fixed upon him, or to deliver and clear himself from it. Provided he stoops to nothing that is contrary to the principles of true honour, and virtue, such a concern is highly just, and reasonable, and what no *wise* man can be without. And, on the contrary, men must be of a temper quite stupid, and destitute of common reflection, if they have no fear at all of *public reproach* and *infamy*, and must lose, besides, what is in the nature of things (and therefore what must appear to be designed as such by the great author of nature) a very powerful restraint from *mean*, *ungenerous*, and *disgraceful practices*.

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3*d*. The principle of *ſelf-preſervation* neceſſarily excites in us a fear of thoſe evils, which we have reaſon to apprehend from the power or malice of any of our fellow creatures, and directs to the uſe of all proper means for our own defence and ſecurity. We are ſo far from being oblig'd to have no care, or ſollicitude on this head, that we ſhall be guilty of the utmoſt raſhneſs and folly, if we expoſe ourſelves to their reſentment unneceſſarily, and run upon any ſufferings, which with honour and a good conſcience, may be avoided. All *innocent*, not excepting the moſt artful, compliances and evaſions muſt be uſed, to ſcreen ourſelves from evils of this kind; otherwiſe, inſtead of being martyrs in a good cauſe, we only ſuffer the natural effects of our own wilfulneſs and obſtinacy. And finally, a *dread* of thoſe puniſhments which the civil magiſtrate inflicts, for the preſervation of mens natural rights, and the ſecurity of their perſons and properties from unjuſt violence, and to deter from the commiſſion of ſuch vices as are inconſiſtent with the publick peace and welfare;

fare; this, I say, is not only lawful, be- SERM.
cause natural inconveniences and evils of IX.
all kinds cannot but be the object of our
fear and aversion, but necessary; both as
the end of these punishments cannot be
answered, nor, consequently, civil societies
subsist, unless we are struck with terror
at the apprehension of them, and because
they are, in themselves, fit and reasonable,
and no more than what the crimes, for
which they are executed, strictly deserve.
A man indeed, that suffers, by *unjust*
human laws, for what is really praise-worthy,
may support himself with this reflection,
that he suffers for the cause of *truth*
and *virtue*, and being conscious of his
integrity, defy the power and cruelty of
his persecutors; but he that can bear to
think, without horror, of being *deservedly*
branded with public infamy, and cut off
as an enemy to society, and the good of
mankind, must have extinguish'd his *reason*,
and lost all remains of *honour* and *ingenuity*.

Thus far then the fear of man may be
defended and justified. In some of the
instances which have been mentioned, it
is,

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is, at leaſt, *lawful*, becauſe founded on principles that human nature cannot throw off; and in others *virtuous*, and *commendable*. But it becomes criminal, when 'tis the *ruling* and *predominant* principle in our minds; becauſe then it either ſuppoſes, that we look upon the approbation and favour of men as our ſupreme good, and upon the frowns, reproaches, and terrors of the world as the greateſt evil that can befal us; or, at leaſt (as 'tis always the nature of that which is the prevailing principle, to *overrule* and *controul* all other principles) it will be to hard for the fear of God, bear down our natural ſenſe of good and evil, and deſtroy that preſence of mind, that conſtancy and reſolution, which is neceſſary to enable us to behave with honour to our nature, and ſutably to thoſe relations in which the all-wiſe creator hath placed us, and to overcome the difficulties of a virtuous courſe. And from this ſhort account of the ſinful *fear of man*, which the text ſpeaks of, it will eaſily appear in the

2*d.* Place,

2*d*. Place, in what sense it *bringeth a snare*, which I proceed therefore to consider. And not to insist on many little mean compliances, and *smaller* inconveniences, to which it exposes men; it throws temptations in their way which are likely to prevail so far, as to destroy all improvements in true wisdom and virtue. For, SERM. IX.

1*st*. Let us suppose a man, under the influence of this *slavish* principle engaged in searches after truth;——what proficiency is it possible for him to make? If he has an extravagant veneration for *human authority*, nothing must be receiv'd but what has *that stamp* upon it.——If he aims at being *popular*, and dreads ill will and censure, no truths can be admitted but such as are *fashionable*, and have the current character and reputation of *orthodoxy*. The odious names of *Infidel* and *Heretic* will frighten him from proceeding in his enquiries, and calling in question the *common standard*.——Or if he is awed by the *vengeance* of *civil* power, and the *terrors* of this world, this must raise an unconquerable aversion in his mind

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mind againſt all truths, that may expoſe him to *danger*, and *ſuffering*.

In order to the making improvements in divine knowledge, 'tis abſolutely neceſſary that the mind be *free*, *calm*, and *unruffled*, under no *reſtraint*, or *terror*; otherwiſe it will be *reſerv'd* and *partial*. There muſt be no *corrupt paſſion* to darken the underſtanding, nor *private intereſt* to miſlead and pervert it. But the man we are ſpeaking of is held in ſtrong fetters; his fears *diſtract* and *confound* him; he ſees difficulties and diſcouragements on every ſide, and but one ſafe path to walk in, even the *old beaten track* chalk'd out by authority, which is the only way to that eſteem, applauſe, and favour, which he ſo ardently purſues, and to avoid that diſgrace, and thoſe ſufferings, which are, of all things, moſt terrible to his imagination.—And being thus *enſlav'd*, is it to be expected that he ſhould exerciſe impartiality and freedom of thought?—Where the light is ſo *offenſive*, is it not highly probable that the eyes of the mind will be ſhut againſt it?—'Tis *difficult* even for men who are influenc'd by more rational

rational and noble principles, and have a virtuous turn of mind, to maintain an unbiaſs'd and ſteddy purſuit of truth, when the world *frowns* upon it, and loads it with *reproaches* and *perſecutions*; but to him, who is ready to ſacrifice every thing to his reputation and worldly intereſt, it muſt be abſolutely *impoſſible*. Let us ſuppoſe, however, that, notwithſtanding his fears, he may be *impartial* in his ſearches after truth; the caſe will be very much the ſame, with reſpect to the good reſulting from it, as if they entirely *ſuppreſs'd* his inquiries. For,

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2*dly*, This principle will infallibly prevail with him, in times of difficulty and danger, either to *conceal*, or *deny* it. 'Tis as great an abſurdity to expect, that one who is diſpirited by worldly fears ſhould be a *confeſſor* and *martyr* for true religion, as that a *coward* ſhould be brave and valiant. The *fearful* and *unbelieving*, or, at leaſt, the rejecters of true religion, when it is oppreſs'd and perſecuted, are therefore juſtly join'd together in ſcripture, becauſe they are, in the nature of things, inſeparable. For the prevailing concern

SERM. IX. of ſuch perſons is to avoid that which is the object of their fears, and, conſequently, every thing elſe muſt give way to it. So that the direct conſequence of this deſtructive principle is inſincerity, and the making *ſhipwreck of faith, and a good conſcience*; and if it had ſway'd in Chriſt and his apoſtles, and the primitive diſciples, Chriſtianity could never have been propagated in the world; and ſhould it univerſally prevail in future ages, mankind muſt for ever remain in their ignorance and errors, without a poſſibility of a reformation.

But this is not the worſt effect of it; for it leads men even to *revile* and *banter* the truth.—Whence, elſe, do many of the *profane ſcoffs*, that are thrown out againſt religion, proceed, but from this ſource? ——The perſons who make uſe of 'em cannot, generally, be ſuſpected of bantering Chriſtianity, upon being convinc'd that 'tis in itſelf ridiculous, becauſe they never examin'd it, or conſider'd the pretenſions on which its authority is founded.——They want either *capacity*, or *inclination*, or *both*, for ſuch an enquiry.

quiry.——The thing is attended with *difficulty*, and requires somewhat of *thought*, which they are strangers and enemies to, and cannot bear the *fatigue* of. But to be a *wit*, and to be *fashionable* in the companies they frequent, is a much easier thing. 'Tis but getting the laugh against revelation, by throwing out a *dull common-place-jest* against it, and the business is done. Tho, as an ingenious author * observes, a very little *sense*, with a good deal of *vice* and *ill nature*, will qualify a man for this kind of satire. I shall conclude what I have to say concerning these *unthinking little critics* with this single remark; that how much soever they may magnify their own abilities, and be puff'd up for being thought persons of refin'd reason, and uncommon penetration, by such as are no wiser than themselves, they really act a very foolish part, in abusing and ridiculing things sacred only because they do not *understand* them, and, for the sake of a light wanton piece of drollery, hazarding the salvation of their immortal souls.

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* *Archbishop* Tillotson.

But

SERM. IX. But to proceed. The ſlaviſh *fear of man* will have the ſame malignant influence upon our morals, as it has been ſhewn to have, in its direct tendency, upon our *faith*. For when it is riſen to ſuch a height, as to overrule the dictates of natural conſcience, and entirely to deſtroy the ſtrength and conſtancy of our minds, we are an eaſy prey to every temptation, and lie open to the moſt deſperate and abandon'd wickedneſs. Its tendency to an immoral practice appears, in part, from what has been already ſaid, wherein it has been ſhewn, that in difficult and diſcouraging times, it leads men to conceal, or deny, the truth, and, conſequently, to *diſſimulation* and *hypocriſy*; but this, being a matter of great importance, deſerves to be more particularly and fully illuſtrated.

Let us ſuppoſe, then, a perſon of this character to live in very corrupt times, when virtue is *unpopular*, and labours under diſgrace, and vice is prevailing and *faſhionable*. He dreads the reproaches of the *multitude*, and yet theſe he is ſure to meet with if he purſues a virtuous courſe

course of life; what then can be expect- SERM.
ed but that he will give himself up to all IX.
the extravagancies of the age, and fall in with the *common* degeneracy? The charge of *singularity*, and the *odium* that attends it, will be more than sufficient to counterballance his weak inclinations towards virtue, and to make him as heartily and universally vitious as the rest of his neighbours; tho it be, really, our glory to be *singular* in asserting the honour of our maker, and vindicating the law of our reasonable nature, which is of the most sacred and indispensable obligation, and a cause of the highest importance; and the utmost pitch of madness to debase our excellent faculties, and make ourselves miserable, only because others are so *frantic* as to do the like, and to avoid the imputation of *obstinate* and *unmannerly preciseness*.

Again, if it be a man's favourite scheme to acquit himself to the *polite* world, and he dreads their contempt as the greatest of all misfortunes; what is the natural consequence? Why, that if these pretenders to politeness are dissolv'd in *effeminacy*, and make *luxury*

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and *riot* the characteriſtic of a fine gentleman, he muſt immediately reſign himſelf up to the gratification of his appetites, and to all the *modiſh* vices. And, accordingly, tho it be indeed ſhocking and monſtrous, and greatly to the diſgrace of the preſent age, there are too many, who, from a *falſe modeſty*, and becauſe they will not be ſo *rude* as to contradict the general humour of their company, are guilty of extravagancies which they have a ſecret abhorrence of; and ſome, 'tis to be fear'd, who to raiſe their character for debauchery, and, conſequently, for an *elegant taſte*, boaſt of vices that they never committed.—— Alas, where is the *reaſon* of mankind, where their becoming ſenſe of the *dignity* of human nature, when they can glory in what is the reproach and ſhame of it; and endeavour to ſupport the reputation, not merely of being *men*, but the moſt *refin'd* part of the ſpecies, on ſuch actions, as ſink 'em below the rank of *brute* creatures! For, in truth, as ſuch perſons will not think for themſelves, they ought to be told, that vice and wickedneſs of all kinds is the greateſt *abuſe* and

vio-

violence that can be offer'd to their rational faculties; ——that there cannot be a fine gentleman without *good sense* and a *just discernment* of things, at least, not without *true honour*, which is inseparable from virtue; —— that blaspheming the establish'd religion of their country, and those things which all considerate and sober men highly value and reverence, is a very *mean* accomplishment, and what not only a serious *Deist*, but even a downright *Atheist*, who has any knowledge of the world, and any notion of *right* behaviour, may be asham'd of; —— and that a *singular aukward dress*, an *impertinent trifling gaiety*, and a *thoughtless unmeaning* conduct, will not atone for a violation of those essential rules of civility and decency. Let me add, that all the vices, into which the evil principle mention'd in the text betrays those who are govern'd by it, argue the utmost baseness of spirit, and consequently both they, and the principle from whence they proceed, are as inconsistent with the character of a *hero*, and a man of *true honour*, as they are with that of a *good Christian.*

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SERM. IX. To conclude this head, If it be our ultimate view to ſecure the countenance and favour of perſons in *authority*, and avoid their diſpleaſure, this likewiſe will ſubject us to many ſnares and inconveniences. The laws indeed of all well regulated ſocieties are favourable to virtue, and pointed at vice and immorality. But notwithſtanding this, the ſtate of things may be, and oftentimes is ſo corrupt, that vicious compliances are neceſſary to obtain the good will of our ſuperiors; and when this is the caſe, the man who is determin'd, at all adventures, to ſecure their approbation, and avoid their frowns, muſt be eaſily captivated and ſeduc'd. He muſt, and probably will, be a companion with them in luxury and prodigality, lie and diſſemble, flatter their vanity, and be the inſtrument of their ambition, covetouſneſs, and unlawful pleaſures. So that, in every view of it, the ſlaviſh *fear of man* has an evident tendency to corrupt our integrity, and leads to the moſt hurtful and deſtructive vices.

But

But it may be ſaid, there is ſtill this advantage, that when authority, power, and intereſt are on the ſide of true religion and virtue, this principle will as effectually excite to a love and reverence of *theſe*, as it will, in contrary circumſtances, to *immorality* and *wickedneſs*. It muſt be own'd it will to outward appearance. But this deſireable ſtate of things is likely to happen but ſeldom, the generality of the world being too frequently in the wrong, with reſpect both to their *opinions*, and *practices*; or if it ſhould happen, men would entirely loſe the *merit* of their affected concern and zeal for virtue and piety, becauſe of motives from which it flows. For nothing can render either our enquiries after truth, or the performance of religious duties properly laudable, but their being the matter of our *free choice*, and our acting from ſuch diſpoſitions, as have a tendency to the ſame conduct in *all* circumſtances. And that virtue, on the contrary, can be worth but little, which in times of proſperity, and when it is countenanc'd and upheld by the influence

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SERM. IX. of authority, and by public favour, only *ſeems* to flouriſh, and does not ſpring from its *genuine* principles; but fades and languiſhes, and entirely diſappears, as ſoon as 'tis brought to a *trial*. Having thus conſider'd the ſnares and temptations, fatal to religion and ſincerity, which attend *the fear of man*, when it is a predominant and governing paſſion. I proceed,

In the third and laſt place, to offer ſome remedies againſt it. And,

1*ſt*. Let us maintain and improve in our minds a ſtrong ſenſe of the neceſſary difference between good and evil. For if we are firmly convinc'd, that there is a fixed and eternal law for the conduct of all rational beings in the nature of things, which cannot be alter'd by *cuſtom* and *opinion*, nor by any *authority* whatſoever, no not by that of God himſelf, we ſhall not be eaſily perſuaded to violate the rules of our duty, upon any conſiderations. Men who think *looſely* may be apt to imagine, that the obligations of virtue are not ſo ſtrict and indiſpenſable; and perhaps, that God will excuſe a deviation from 'em, when they are *forced* to it

by reproaches and persecutions. But had they enquired into the true grounds of morality, they would have found that its obligation is immutable, and, consequently, that where there is a wilful departure from it, nothing can possibly recommend us to the divine favour. And thus a more steddy regard to religion would prevail, and *the fear of man* proportionably decrease. To this remedy against it, let us add, SERM. IX.

2*dly*, A becoming sense of the *dignity* of our nature. This can only be supported by an inflexible adherence to the rules of virtue and true goodness; but, by improving in these, we are capable of advancing to a *God-like* perfection. And shall we dishonour and obscure our rational powers, by enslaving 'em to vice and wickedness? This thought, made habitual to our minds, would sustain our resolution against all the terrors of the world; this thought, I say, that we have the honour to be formed after the *image* of God, and that as long as we maintain our moral rectitude, we continue to *resemble* him; and, especially, that by being

SERM. IX. ſtedfaſt in our duty, in ſpite of all oppoſitions and diſcouragements, we imitate the greateſt and moſt exalted part of his character, his *conſtant and invariable* goodneſs.

3*dly*, Againſt the vice pointed at in the text, the wiſe man adviſes as a remedy, in the latter part of the verſe, *truſt in God: the fear of man bringeth a ſnare, but whoſo putteth his truſt in the Lord, ſhall be ſafe.* For if we firmly believe the wiſdom and goodneſs of his overruling providence, that he orders all things for the beſt, and with a deſign to promote the general happineſs; and that all the evils we ſuffer for righteouſneſs ſake will be abundantly compenſated, and turn, in the end, to our unſpeakable advantage; this ought, in reaſon, to moderate our fears, compoſe the hurry and diſorder of our minds, and reconcile us to all events. And, accordingly, we find this ſerene and pious diſpoſition in the holy *Pſalmiſt*, who expreſſes himſelf thus, with an air of ſecurity and triumph: *The Lord is my light, and my ſalvation, whom ſhall I fear? The Lord* is *the ſtrength*

Pſ. xxvii. 1.

ſtrength of my life, of whom ſhall I be afraid? and again, *The Lord* is *on my ſide, I will not fear what man can do unto me.* SERM. IX. Pſ. cxviii. 6.

Finally, as the moſt *effectual* remedy againſt the fear of man, let us cultivate a ſupreme reverence of God. Theſe two are abſolutely inconſiſtent, and cannot ſubſiſt together. For as the fear of man deſtroys our due regards to the divine majeſty, the true fear of God will *limit*, and reduce within *reaſonable* bounds, the dread of our fellow-creatures. Let us, therefore, by frequent meditation, fix in our minds a lively idea of his abſolute perfection. Let us contemplate his ſpotleſs holineſs, ſtrict impartial juſtice, infinite power, and boundleſs wiſdom, in order to excite the higheſt poſſible awe and veneration of him. Let us ſeriouſly conſider that he is the author of our being, and of every thing we enjoy, that we are neceſſarily dependent upon him, that our happineſs and miſery are entirely in his power, who has univerſal nature at his command, and is the ſovereign uncontroulable diſpoſer of all events;

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events; and, conſequently, that his favour is our *life*, and his diſpleaſure the moſt dreadful of all evils. And if we are afraid of the reproaches of ignorant, prejudiced, and ſinful men, how much more ſtrongly ſhould we be concerned to prevent his having an ill opinion of us, who is the greateſt and beſt of beings, and whoſe judgment is always according to truth, certain and infallible? To conclude, the wiſdom of God is capable of contriving, and his power of executing vengeance infinitely more terrible on impenitent ſinners, than any thing they can undergo in the preſent ſtate; and whereas the ſcene of all the tyranny and oppreſſion which we can ſuffer from our fellow-creatures, is confined within the narrow compaſs of this mortal and uncertain exiſtence, he has *an unchangeable and endleſs life*, and, conſequently, can not only puniſh in what *degree*, but to what *length* of *duration* he pleaſes. Our ſaviour's advice, therefore, is certainly very juſt and reaſonable; *not* to *fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the ſoul; but rather*

Mat. x. 28.

ther to *fear him*, who after having made perverſe and irreclaimable offenders miſerable, in ſuch a meaſure, and for ſo long a period, as the wiſe ends of his government require, can abſolutely *deſtroy both ſoul and body in hell.*

SERMON

SERMON X.

Rules for the profitable reading the Holy Scriptures.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the ſcriptures.——

AS mankind are endued with moral powers, and conſequently accountable creatures, it neceſſarily follows, that they had always a law or rule of action *ſufficient* to direct their conduct. The *original* and *univerſal* law was what we call the law, or religion of nature. This their

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their *reaſon* was capable of diſcovering; and it would have taught them, if they had conſulted, and carefully attended to it, the being and perfections of God, his providential government of the world, the duties they owed to him, and one another, and which related to the right government of their affections and appetites; and, in ſhort, how to behave in the various circumſtances and relations of human life. In like manner, it would have furniſhed proper motives to a regular and virtuous conduct,——from the excellency of virtue in itſelf;——its neceſſary tendency to the perfection and happineſs of human nature, and the good of ſociety;——and by giving a well grounded hope, in ſome way or other worthy his infinite wiſdom, and concern for the rectitude and order of the moral world, of the ſpecial protection and favour of their Creator, and ſupreme Governour.

But notwithſtanding this wiſe proviſion, by the natural light planted in every man's mind, the world became, in fact, *groſsly* and almoſt *univerſally* depraved; ran

ran into deplorable ignorance of God; into childish and very dishonourable conceptions of his nature and attributes; into idolatry; and an absurd, hurtful, and endless superstition; and their RELIGION corrupted their morals. 'Twas not because their reason was, *in itself*, insufficient to direct to better sentiments of things, but because it was not *improved* and *cultivated*. However as mankind were really thus corrupted, and had lost, in a great measure, the knowledge of the true religion of nature, the expediency and usefulness of a revelation was not at all the less, merely because reason, if rightly exercised, was capable of discovering all the necessary principles of morality; nay, indeed, the advantage of it is altogether as evident, as it would have been if men were *unavoidably* ignorant of the great truths of religion. For how they came to be out of the way is not the question, whether it proceeded from a defect in their natural powers, or from want of attention, and not using these powers as they ought; in both cases, 'tis certain, they *needed* to be set right again, SERM. X.

SERM. X. gain, and recovered to a juſt ſenſe of their duty, and happineſs. And accordingly God was pleaſed graciouſly to interpoſe, and give a revelation ſuited to the *circumſtances* and *neceſſities* of an ignorant and degenerate world. But tho' this revelation was an unſpeakable privilege *at firſt*, by putting a ſtop to ſuperſtition and wickedneſs, and diffuſing light and knowledge amongſt men; tho' it may *ſtill* be of the utmoſt uſe, to the bulk of mankind, as *a ſtanding rule*, by ſupplying them conſtantly with proper thoughts, which is what the common people, in all ages, have moſt wanted, and preſcribing a plain, intelligible, and compleat rule of morals; notwithſtanding, I ſay, that a revelation is ſo deſireable a bleſſing, and may anſwer ſuch valuable purpoſes, 'tis certain that men may pervert it, as well as extinguiſh their reaſon; and that if it be neglected, and not examined into with care and impartiality, it will be, juſt as that natural light was, and is at preſent, in the more ignorant and ſuperſtitious parts of the world, *dark* and *uſeleſs*. Of which the monſtrous corruptions

tions of Chriſtianity in *Popiſh* countries, equal to any corruptions of natural religion in the moſt barbarous *Heathen* nations, are a notorious and unanſwerable proof. SERM. X.

'Tis indeed a principle of their faith, that the common people are not to examine into their religion; but take it *implicitly* from the church. And it muſt be allowed, that this is a neceſſary principle to eſtabliſh *antichriſtian tyranny* over the conſciences of men, and ſupport ſchemes of doctrine which bid defiance to reaſon, and are inconſiſtent with the whole deſign and tenour of revelation. Theſe things will not bear the light, nor ſtand a free and impartial trial, and therefore are ſheltered under the covert of ignorance and darkneſs. But can any thing be more abſurd than ſuch a conduct as this? Does it not derogate, in the higheſt degree, from the excellency and perfection of the ſcriptures? is it not a very unworthy and injurious reflection on the wiſdom and goodneſs of God? nay does it not entirely deſtroy all the ends and uſes of the Chriſtian revelation?

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'Twill be needleſs to enter into a large proof of theſe things in any nation where *light* and *liberty* prevails, and perſons have a juſt notion of their rights, either as *men*, or as *Chriſtians*. For if God gives any revelation at all, the common ſenſe of mankind determines, that it muſt, in all eſſential and important branches of it, be a plain and eaſy rule; obvious to the capacities of all for whoſe benefit it is deſigned. For what is the end of a revelation? Is it not to inſtruct the ignorant, and conſequently to lay down plain principles for directing and regulating their behaviour? Or is it to amuſe and confound their minds yet more with *deep ſubtilties*, with *perplexed* and *intricate* ſpeculations? A revelation that is not intelligible is as much a contradiction, as to ſay darkneſs is light. And there is an unanſwerable force in the common argument uſed upon this occaſion, *viz.* either that God *could not* reveal himſelf clearly in thoſe points which are of the greateſt conſequence to mankind, or that he *would not*. The former of theſe reflects upon his *wiſdom*, the latter on his *goodneſs*;

goodneſs; ſo that either way, the ſuppoſition is unworthy of God, and diſhonourable to his perfections; ſince it repreſents him as a very *weak*, or elſe as a *capricious ill-natured* being, who intended not to aſſiſt, but bewilder his creatures, and lead them into a maze of uncertainty and confuſion. SERM. X.

Again, a revelation that is dangerous to be read, and can't be truſted to the reaſon and jndgment of mankind, that needs to be *illuſtrated*, *corrected*, or *ſupplied* by a *living infallible oracle*, and *judge of controverſies*, is altogether as inſignificant as no revelation at all. If men have *a ſtanding rule* to have recourſe to, 'tis, at leaſt, poſſible, that if they ſeriouſly conſider and ſearch into it, they may frame juſt notions of things, a rational ſcheme to act upon. But if they are *blindly* to follow their ſpiritual guides, and ſwallow all their doctrines *implicitly*, they are liable to endleſs impoſtures; and can have no guard againſt the moſt *ſtupid enthuſiaſm*, nor even againſt *irreligion* itſelf.

SERM. X. Finally, a revelation designed for *general* use, which is evidently the case of the Christian, must be chiefly calculated for the bulk of mankind, and adapted to their capacities. The *ingenious* and *thinking* part have, in every age, been a very few; and the generality persons of *little reflection*, who must be instructed in the most easy and familiar manner, and taught their duty with the greatest plainness and simplicity. To assert therefore that the scriptures are obscure, and unintelligible, full of mystery and darkness, renders them quite useless as an *universal* rule; and consequently defeats the very end of their being written, which was *general* instruction; and to deny the reading of them to the *common people* is to deny it to those, for whose benefit they were more directly and immediately intended. This is the manifest reason of the thing.

Agreeably hereto, we find the scripture itself is so far from *debarring* the people of this right, that it *insists* upon it, and *encourages* it in the strongest terms. There are no distinctions of persons, some

to *lead*, and others *abſolutely to ſubmit* to their interpretations and deciſions; but the exhortations and inſtructions are *general*. They were not the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, and *Doctors* of the law, but the *common ſort* of Jews, to whom our ſaviour ſaid in the text, *ſearch the ſcriptures*; nay, whom he ſuppoſes not only capable of underſtanding the *plain* doctrines and laws of the Old Teſtament, but the more *obſcure* and *intricate* parts of it, the prophecies relating to the Meſſiah; *ſearch the ſcriptures, they are they that teſtify of me*. And for this the people of *Berea* are greatly commended, *viz.* for not believing the Apoſtles themſelves implicitly, but *ſearching the ſcriptures daily, whether theſe things were ſo*. This practice of theirs is repreſented as the mark of a *noble* and *ingenuous* mind; whereas the contrary ſprings from abject and ſlaviſh prejudice. In like manner St. *Paul* ſpeaks of *Timothy*, and deſcribes it as what had been of great advantage to him, *that from a child he had known the holy ſcriptures*. And of thoſe ſame ſcriptures he ſays, that they were *able to make him wiſe unto ſalva-*

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Acts xvii. 11.

2 Tim. i 15.

Ibid.

SERM. X. Ver. 16, 17.

tion; and again, *all ſcripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works.* Now if it was the duty of *all* to ſearch into the *Jewiſh* ſcriptures, and even into dark prophecies, the common people muſt certainly be proper judges of, and conſequently obliged to examine into, the plain facts, doctrines, and moral precepts of Chriſtianity. Nay, it can't be reconciled to the wiſdom of God to ſuppoſe, that the *laſt* and moſt *perfect* revelation of his will is not alſo the *cleareſt* and *fulleſt*; or that the ſame characters of being *profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and inſtruction in righteouſneſs*, which render it fit to be peruſed and ſtudied by all, do not belong to that in a much higher degree, than they did to a *preparatory* revelation of *inferior* conſequence, and more *limited* extent.

And as the right of all the people to ſearch the ſcriptures is evident, founded in reaſon, and ſtrongly aſſerted in the revelation itſelf; ſo are the advantages of it.

it.——Reading the ſcriptures, with ſe- SERM.
rioufneſs and diligence, is the natural way X.
for men to form a *conſiſtent* and *rational* ſcheme of belief and practice, juſt notions of God, and of the extent of religious and moral obligations. By this means, they will have a *ſtrait eaſy* rule to go by, and build their hopes of happineſs upon a ſolid foundation. Whereas the want of it has introduced *incomprehenſible* and *ſenſeleſs* articles of faith, doctrines prejudicial to *morality*, *dark* and *gloomy* notions of God, and *ſuperſtitious* fears deſtructive of the peace and comfort of men's minds.——Reading the ſcriptures, with impartiality, will inſpire ſincere and honeſt minds with *humanity* and *benevolence*, with *moderation* and *forbearance* in leſſer differences. But the neglect of it occaſions hot and angry controverſies, blind and violent diſputes, and a zeal without *knowledge* or *diſcretion*.—Again, by this means common Chriſtians will better underſtand the *grounds* of their faith, and conſequently be more firmly eſtabliſhed in it. They will be more fully acquainted with the *intrinſic* ex-

SERM. X. cellence of the doctrines of Christianity, and the strength and force of its *external* evidence; and so be believers, not upon the foot of *tradition* and *authority*, which confirms all religions equally, but upon rational conviction and choice. They will also find it much more easy to detect the sophistry and false reasoning of its adversaries; whose practice 'tis, and in that they must soon be discovered by such as study the scriptures, to expose and argue against the corruptions and extravagancies of *party-schemes* as true Christianity.

But the greatest motive of all to a diligent search of the Holy Scriptures, is that mentioned in the text, that in them we *believe* we *have eternal life*. Therein we have an assurance of a happy immortality, as the reward of true piety and virtue, which to reason is very *obscure* and *doubtful* at least, if at all *probable*. Reason may discover something, *in general*, of a future state of rewards, but gives very little ground to expect that they will be *eternal*. This is the *unspeakable gift* of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As

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As therefore the gospel is the only sure foundation we have of this glorious hope, we should read it frequently for the satisfaction and comfort of our minds, and carefully examine upon what terms we may hope to be entitled to it. This is the most important interest of our being, and should therefore be the chief object of our study. An error here may be of fatal consequence, which renders our utmost diligence necessary. And as these sacred writings contain the rule by which we shall be judged, and have our eternal condition determined, need any thing be added to excite us to search into them with the greatest exactness, as for the most excellent and beneficial knowledge; and with the greatest impartiality, that we may not be imposed on in so high and momentous a concern. Indolence or negligence, in this great point, is certainly most unaccountable and unpardonable stupidity. But I must content myself with just mentioning these things, that I may proceed to what I chiefly design'd, and judge to be the most useful part of a discourse on this subject, *viz.*

to

SERM. X. to lay down ſome rules for the profitable reading the ſcriptures. By not obſerving theſe rules men have loſt all the advantages of this ſtudy; and beſides from hence have riſen all thoſe inconveniences, which have been repreſented as the natural conſequence of allowing the uſe of them to the common people, and urg'd as arguments againſt it.

The firſt thing that I would recommend is, that we come to the ſearch with honeſt and unprejudic'd minds. In order to the finding out truth in the great points that relate to moral practice, *an acute underſtanding* is not ſo neceſſary as *a ſincere upright heart*; and even the *plainneſs* of the rule itſelf does not contribute more towards it, than *integrity* and *impartiality* in thoſe who are to be guided by it. *Prejudice* will pervert and darken the plaineſt rule. And therefore if men apply to the ſtudy of the ſcriptures with minds prepoſſeſs'd in favour of any particular ſcheme; if they take it for granted, before they have examined, that this is the religion of the bible; all they have to do is, in the beſt manner they can, to *accomodate* ſcripture

ſcripture to it. By their being thus pre-determined all farther light is precluded; paſſages of ſcripture are ſtrained, and tortured, and darkened by *unnatural* comments; becauſe men ſearch the ſcripture not to find out the ſenſe of *that*, but to make it ſpeak *their own* ſenſe. But, on the contrary, if their minds are free and diſengaged, and they have no concern but for truth, the rule of ſcripture is ſo plain in all eſſential points, that they can hardly, with an ordinary degree of judgment, miſtake it. In the natural courſe of things, ſuch an honeſt ingenuous temper, diveſted of all prejudice, all attachment to favourite opinions, will lead to the knowledge of every neceſſary truth, and ſecure from dangerous and hurtful errors. 'Tis indeed the ſureſt groundwork and foundation of proficiency in divine knowledge; without which, the greateſt abilities will ſerve but to *confound* and *puzzle* a man the more, as they furniſh a thouſand little evaſions, and help him to give plauſible colours to falſhood, and conſequently will carry him ſo much the farther from the end propoſed. SERM. X.

2*dly*, In

SERM. X. 2*dly*, In all our ſearches into ſcripture, let us keep this rule conſtantly in view, that revelation is founded on *reaſon*, and *natural religion*; and therefore that none of the peculiar doctrines of revealed religion can ſubvert that, or contradict any of its principles. The religion of nature is eternal immutable truth, of certain and indiſpenſable authority, and, conſequently, can't be ſuperſeded, or, in the leaſt, altered by external revelation. And if men had always thought of this, they would never have entertained opinions, upon *a pretended ſcripture warrant*, diſhonourable to God, and deſtructive of the very firſt principles of morality. They would never, for inſtance, have looked on any thing as the revealed truth of God, which is inconſiſtent with his UNITY, the fundamental article of all religion; never have magnified faith above virtue; or made true piety conſiſt in outward formality; in an idle uſeleſs ſuperſtition; nay, in a violent injurious zeal, that tramples upon the obligations of juſtice and charity. They would never, from a few *obſcure* paſſages *rigorouſly* interpreted,

terpreted, nay, from the *mere ſound* of words, have conceived of the Deity as ſevere and implacable, ſlow to be appeaſed, but eaſy to be affronted; or as an arbitrary ſovereign, whoſe will is his only law; and who, without any regard to their ſeveral qualifications, has abſolutely determined the happineſs of a few of his creatures, and conſigned over all the reſt, vaſtly the greater number, to irremediable and endleſs miſery. Had men, I ſay, formed juſt notions of natural religion, and conſidered all its principles as of invariable and neceſſary truth, they could never have imagined ſcripture to contain ſuch ſentiments as theſe, which are evidently repugnant to reaſon; and, eſpecially, to what the light of nature teaches concerning the unlimited goodneſs of the great Creator, which is ſo viſible in the frame of the univerſe, and the general courſe of providence. Such *injudicious* interpreters of ſcripture little conſider, how much they reproach revelation itſelf by fathering thoſe abſurd doctrines upon it, as well as abuſe their own underſtandings. For the religion of nature

SERM. X. nature cannot but be *true*; what then is the conſequence of making any particular revelation oppoſe and undermine it, but that that revelation is neceſſarily *falſe?*

3*dly*, In interpreting ſcripture always regard the *general ſcope* and *deſign* of it. Let thoſe who have leiſure read whole books at once, or, at leaſt, to the end of proper periods, that they may have an entire and connected view of the things contained in them. For it muſt give us but confuſed ideas to break off in the midſt of a narration; or jumble together parts of different facts; ſo likewiſe to read only ſelect portions out of epiſtles, and thoſe, perhaps, injudiciouſly choſen, when there is *one deſign* purſued in the whole, and a continued *reference* throughout. Be careful likewiſe to attend to the *connection* of the writer, and the thread of his reaſoning. For, in all writings, *independent* paſſages may be urged to ſerve all manner of purpoſes; by which means the graveſt and moſt judicious authors may be forced to talk *ludicrouſly*, and *inconſiſtently*; and the beſt and moſt uſeful books,

books, which are written with the ſtrict- SERM.
eſt regard to virtue, be made to counte- X.
nance *vice* and *impiety*.

And, indeed, it has happened, that the holy ſcriptures, of all other books, have been moſt groſly perverted and abuſed this way. Common writings have, in the main, and unleſs in the heat of controverſy, been treated with fairneſs and candour enough. But the writings of the Old and New Teſtament, by picking out of them *little ſcraps*, and *ſeparate portions*, (which can't be underſtood but by attending to their connection, nor urged as proofs of any thing, in oppoſition to the general view of the revelation, without rendering it perfectly unintelligible and uſeleſs) the ſacred writings, I ſay, by being thus *mangled* and *torn to pieces*, have been repreſented as teaching the moſt abſurd, nay, indeed, very impious and immoral doctrines. The building doctrines therefore upon *ſingle texts* may lead us into great and dangerous miſtakes. I might illuſtrate this by a multitude of examples; but I would not be tedious, and therefore ſhall confine

SERM. X. myſelf to one inſtance, *viz.* the words of the prophet *Jeremiah*, *the heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked, who can know it?*

This paſſage, divided from the context, and conſidered as a general independent propoſition, has been uſed to as ſtrange a purpoſe as one can well imagine, *viz.* to prove that men are not acquainted with THEMSELVES; that tho *ſelf-conſciouſneſs* be inſeparable from, and the diſtinguiſhing excellence and privilege of their being rational, they are ſtrangers to their own hearts, know not what their own views and intentions are, nor what the prevailing habits and diſpoſitions of their minds. This haſty concluſion, I ſay, has been drawn from theſe words (which if it was applied to *civil* affairs, as it is to religion, muſt create the utmoſt confuſion) not only in oppoſition to the general ſenſe and experience of mankind, but quite contrary to the deſign of the author himſelf. This will evidently appear if we conſider the connection, and the general reaſoning that he is purſuing.

For

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For, in the 5th verſe God, is introduced as denouncing a woe againſt all thoſe, who fix their ultimate dependence on human power and policy. In the 7th and 8th verſes is deſcribed the wiſdom and happineſs of truſting in the Lord, and making him our ſtrength. Then follows the text we are conſidering, which by all rules of good interpretation (ſince there is not the leaſt mark of the prophet's beginning *a new topic* of diſcourſe) muſt be referred to the ſame argument, and contain another ſtrong reaſon againſt making man our confidence; *the heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked, who can know it?* i. e. "There may be infinite "*devices* and *ſubtilties* in the hearts of "men, which thou can'ſt not under-"ſtand. While they promiſe thee fair, "and make the warmeſt proteſtations of "affection and zeal for thy ſervice, their "intentions may be the direct contrary, "and their views *private* and *ſelfiſh*. "Their reſolutions are fickle and muta-"ble, and many little circumſtances may "prevail with them to change their pur-

SERM. X. "poſes; and ſo render their promiſes "vain and deluſory. Nay, 'tis poſſi- "ble for them to arrive at ſuch a pitch "of *premeditated* and *deſperate* wicked- "neſs, as to endeavour, even under "*friendly* pretences, to undermine thine "intereſt. Place not therefore thy ſu- "preme and ultimate confidence in man, "but repoſe it in the unchangeable God; "who, as by reaſon of the perfect and "neceſſary rectitude of his nature he "can't deceive thee, ſo as he is abſolute "lord of the univerſe, and the uncon- "troulable diſpoſer of all events, he muſt "be able with eaſe to effect every thing, "that is neceſſary for thy ſecurity and "happineſs."

To the directions above-mention'd about obſerving the general deſign of ſcripture, and the connection of particular paſſages, which is neceſſary in interpreting all writings whatever; let me add, that 'tis proper for us to make ſome allowances for the *difference* of languages, and the *peculiar phraſes* and *idioms* uſed by the people, for whom the ſcriptures were *originally* and more *immediately* deſigned.

ſigned. I ſhall explain this a little by the words *for ever*, and *everlaſting*, which are far from having the ſame force, in the ſacred writings, as they generally have in our own language. For 'tis certain that they do not always ſignify a *ſtrict* and *abſolute* eternity, but very frequently a *limited* duration; and the ſenſe of them is, in a great meaſure, to be determined by the ſubjects to which they are applied. Thus every one allows, that when we read of *everlaſting mountains*, the word means very differently from what it does when God is ſaid to be *everlaſting*. Again, when 'tis ſaid of Chriſt, that *he ſhall reign over the houſe of* Jacob *for ever, and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end*, we are to underſtand no more by it, than that he ſhall reign to the end of the world; for *then*, we are expreſly informed by St. *Paul*, *he ſhall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;--that God may be all in all.* In like manner, when we are told that Sodom *and* Gomorrah *are ſet forth for an example, ſuffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, nothing more is meant than

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Hab. iii. 6.

Luke i. 33.

1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

Jude v. 7.

SERM. X. a fire that made a full end of them, and was not extinguiſhed, till thoſe cities, with their inhabitants, were utterly conſumed. In theſe paſſages, and in ſome others, which ſeldom regard things of real importance, we muſt allow for the *change* of languages, and *different uſe* of words; and the common people will, without much difficulty, fall into the true interpretation of all paſſages of this kind, if they follow but the natural and eaſy method of comparing one part of ſcripture with another.

4*thly*, Another rule of great importance is, to explain *dark figurative* paſſages, parables, metaphors, allegories, *&c.* by ſuch as are *plain*, and their ſenſe *unconteſtable*. Thoſe parts of ſcripture, which are expreſs'd in the cleareſt and moſt ſimple manner, give a complete and rational account of the perfections and providence of God, and a noble ſcheme of morality. And explaining *dark* paſſages in a book, which, it is generally believed, can contain no contradictions and inconſiſtencies, by ſuch as are *plain* and *indiſputable*, muſt be allowed

ed to be the moſt natural method of interpreting it. And if the common people take care to follow this method, and make any uſe of their reaſon, they can't be miſled, by the *peculiar ſtile* and *phraſe* of ſcripture, into unworthy conceptions of God, or miſtake the general nature of true religion. Whereas, if they *ſtrain* figures to their utmoſt height, and put parables and metaphors upon the *rack*, they may, indeed, extort *ſtrange* ſenſes from them, and draw the moſt *wild* and *extravagant* concluſions. SERM. X.

In *figurative* ways of ſpeaking there is one grand point intended, which is, generally, obvious to a fair inquirer. If he goes beyond this, and argues ſtrictly and rigorouſly from every circumſtance, what may he not deduce from ſcripture this way? Thus when the converſion and ſanctification of a ſinner is ſtiled *regeneration*, and *the new creature*, the general deſign of theſe expreſſions is only this, that he is entered upon a new kind of life, has thoroughly changed his principles and methods of acting; and is, indeed, in the temper of his mind,

SERM. X. and prevailing diſpoſitions, *quite another creature* from what he was before. But is it not moſt unaccountable, that any ſhould ſtrain this metaphor ſo prodigiouſly, as to make mankind mere *machines*, who can do no more towards their reformation from ſin to virtue, than a dead body towards reſtoring itſelf to life, or a creature towards giving itſelf being; and, thereby, render all the exhortations and commands of the goſpel to repent, and turn from our evil ways, *impertinent* and *trifling?* The folly of this forced and unnatural method of interpreting is clearly ſeen in other inſtances, and univerſally allowed; for when 'tis ſaid, that *the day of the Lord ſo cometh as a thief in the night*, who ever imagined, upon the bare force of this metaphor, that it will be attended with injuſtice and violence? And the true reaſon why men think juſtly on the *one*, and not on the *other* is, that in the one caſe they proceed *impartially*, and, being under no *biaſs*, take the natural and moſt obvious ſenſe of ſcripture; whereas, in the other, their judgment is already determined in favour of ſome *party ſcheme*,

1 Theſſ. v. 2.

ſcheme, which they take all opportunities and all advantages to ſupport. SERM. X.

5*thly*, I would adviſe thoſe who want leiſure, opportunity, and, perhaps, capacity for *critical* enquiries, to read chiefly the *plain* parts of ſcripture; thoſe, eſpecially, which deſcribe the perfections and providence of God, or contain practical inſtructions, and goſpel motives and encouragements to virtue; and to trouble themſelves but little about doubtful paſſages that are only *incidental*, and have no immediate connection with the *grand deſign* of the revelation. For if Chriſtianity be rightly underſtood in its *practical* doctrines, and as it is a *moral* rule, which, without doubt, muſt be the chief intention of any revelation; other obſcurities, about antient cuſtoms, manners, ſects, philoſophy, &c. nay, about any points merely *ſpeculative*, ſignify juſt nothing. For as God would never have given a revelation if the errors of the world had not been of a *practical* nature, but conſiſted only in abſurd *theories*; ſo differences about ſuch things may always continue, nay, the bulk of the world may

SERM. X. know but little about them, and yet all the ends and uſes of the Chriſtian revelation, as a ſtanding rule, be completely anſwered. Thoſe who have time, and proper abilities, may commendably imploy their thoughts about theſe leſſer matters; but others, who have neither a genius, nor opportunities for ſpeculation, act wiſely in not medling with it, but confining themſelves to more important and eſſential points.

In the laſt place, as the great end of revelation muſt be to promote the practice of virtue, we learn from hence a ſure rule, by which to judge of the *importance* of the ſeveral doctrines of it. We ſhould lay no ſtreſs upon any but as it tends to promote a holy life, and upon all, juſt in proportion to their tendency to this great and deſirable end. And, upon this foot, what will become of moſt of the *controverſies*, that have been ſo furiouſly agitated in the Chriſtian world, in which the *beſt* part of religion is not at all concerned? Learn then to employ your chief zeal about the *weightier matters of the law, doing juſtly, loving mercy,*

mercy, and walking humbly with God; and be but little ſollicitous about ſpeculative opinions, and matters of *doubtful diſputation. Follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.* For then only will you have ſtudied the ſcriptures to a right purpoſe, when *ye have purified your ſouls, in obeying the truth thro' the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren*; and learned to practiſe *the wiſdom that is from above*, which *is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy.*

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Micah vi. 8. Rom. xiv. xix. James iii. 17.

I have nothing farther to add, but to *commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are ſanctified.*

Acts xx. 32.

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SERMON XI.

Of Hereſy.

TITUS iii. 10, 11.

A man that is an heretic, after the firſt and ſecond admonition reject; knowing that he that is ſuch is ſubverted, and ſinneth, being condemned of himſelf.

IS ſurpriſing to think, what a vaſt influence the mere ſound of words, *artfully* manag'd, has upon the generality of mankind, both to confound their judgment, and inflame their paſſions. This the dealers in controverſy ſeem to be univerſally

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verſally aware of, and therefore ſcarce ever fail to have recourſe to it, as the ſureſt method of engaging on their ſides the *popular* prejudices, and ruining the credit of their adverſaries. The favourite terms of reproach made uſe of againſt Chriſtianity are *enthuſiaſm*, *ſuperſtition*, *prieſt-craft*, which have a prodigious effect on weak and ſhallow minds, as long as they are apply'd in a *confuſed*, *general* way, without any diſtinct or determinate ideas; they operate like a *charm*, while proper care is taken to keep the people in the dark; but by being juſtly explain'd loſe their *magical* influence entirely, becauſe they appear not to be at all applicable to the *real* doctrines, and duties of the Chriſtian religion, but only to the *ſupplements*, *innovations*, and *corruptions* of ignorant and prejudic'd, or of deſigning and intereſted men.

And, among Chriſtians themſelves, the word *hereſy*, particularly, for want of being rightly underſtood, has been, in every age, an engine of defamation and violence; by which perſons of differing ſentiments and intereſts, or of ſtrong paſ-

ſions, have vented their rage and animo- SERM.
ſity one againſt another. It has been XI.
charg'd *promiſcuouſly* on truth and error; and the beſt characters, both for ſound knowledge, and integrity, have had the hard fate to fall under the imputation of it; and, in conſequence, have been ſtigmatiz'd as reprobates, debarr'd the privileges of Chriſtian communion, and treated with the utmoſt contempt and barbarity. As this word has been manag'd by *hot* and *paſſionate* tempers, by *eccleſiaſtical politicians*, and *bigotted enthuſiaſts*, it has been the inſtrument of endleſs ſchiſms and confuſions. For hereſy has been made to ſignify every thing be it right or wrong, that contradicts the *eſtabliſh'd* opinions of the times, and the outcry againſt it has, generally, been loudeſt in the moſt *corrupt* and *degenerate* ſtate. Nay, private Chriſtians, in the courſe of their religious debates, ſetting up their ſenſe of ſcripture as the ſtandard and teſt of truth, have mutually hereticated and denounc'd their anathemas againſt each other; by which unjuſt method of proceeding, they have

not

SERM. XI. not only diſcourag'd an impartial ſtudy of the ſcriptures, and a free inquiry into the doctrines of the goſpel; but have divided, and conſequently weaken'd, the intereſts of our holy religion, and expos'd it to the ſcorn and inſults of unbelievers.

As therefore the word hereſy has been apply'd in ſo *ridiculous*, and withal ſo *injurious* a manner, to the diſhonour, and great prejudice of the beſt and moſt uſeful ſcheme of religion that ever appear'd in the world; as the miſapplication of it will ſtill continue to produce the ſame evils; and, finally, as the thing itſelf is of the higheſt conſequence, it being a heinous offence againſt *Chriſtian ſincerity*, tho' it has been almoſt conſtantly miſunderſtood either thro' ignorance, partiality, or craft, and made to ſignify mere errors, or only ſuppoſed errors in *ſpeculation*, of no importance to the cauſe of ſolid virtue, or the happineſs of mankind; theſe being conſider'd, I ſay, it may be uſeful for us to enquire into the true nature of it. And, for this purpoſe, I have choſen theſe words of

St. *Paul*, to be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe, in which he ſo particularly characterizes an heretic, that we can't miſs knowing him if we attend to his deſcription, and give directions to *Titus* in what manner to deal with him: *A man that is an heretic*, &c. And, indeed, all the other accounts we have of this matter are ſo clear and expreſs, and have ſo little of difficulty or ambiguity in them, that 'tis ſcarce poſſible the word ſhould be abus'd in that groſs manner it has been, and perverted from its original deſign, if men had not conſulted their own *paſſions* and *prejudices* more than the Holy Scriptures; and if the ſignification of it had not been artfully chang'd to ſerve *a turn*, whereby the ignorant and unwary have been impos'd on in all ages. For as theſe are too much under *management*, and diſpos'd to ſpeak as they are *taught*, inſtead of examining for themſelves into the nature and reaſon of things, 'tis no wonder that they call every one an heretic, that is declar'd to be ſuch by their *ſuperiors*, thoſe eſpecially to whom they have reſign'd the direction of their *conſciences*;

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SERM. XI. *conſciences*; 'tis no wonder, that they apply to him all the bad characters which they find of heretics in the New Teſtament, and conſequently conſider him as an *infamous* perſon, and devoted to *deſtruction*; or, that having giving him ſuch a monſtrous and frightful dreſs, they hunt him down, and purſue him with *inſolence* and *cruelty*. This is the natural conſequence of implicit faith, and an indiſcreet intemperate zeal. But to proceed more directly to the point before us.

HERESY, in the New Teſtament, is, moſt commonly, uſed in an *indifferent* ſenſe, and, but ſeldom, in a *bad* one. It, generally, ſignifies no more than a *ſect* or *party* in religion. Thus we read of *the ſect*, or hereſy, *of the* Saducees; of *the ſect*, or hereſy, *of the* Phariſees; St. *Paul* is ſtil'd *a ringleader of the ſect*, or hereſy, *of the* Nazarenes; and he ſays of himſelf, that *after the Strickeſt ſect* (where the ſame *Greek* word is uſed) of the *Jewiſh* religion, he lived a *Phariſee*. In this laſt paſſage, particularly, nothing can be more plain than that the word has an *innocent meaning*; ſince the Apoſtle

Acts v. 17. Chap. xv. 5. Ch. xxiv. 5. Ch. xxvi. 5.

tle rather *commends*, than charges himſelf with any thing *criminal*, for having been a *Phariſee* before his converſion to the Chriſtian faith. And we find it applied in the ſame manner, *Acts* xxviii. 22. where, upon St. *Paul*'s coming to *Rome*, we are told, that the *Jews*, who inhabited there, deſired to hear his thoughts of Chriſtianity, and what he had to offer in defenſe of it; for, ſay they, *as concerning this ſect*, or hereſy, *we know, that every where it is ſpoken againſt.* I ſhall mention but one text more, and that is 1 *Cor.* xi. 19. *for there muſt alſo be hereſies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifeſt.* The evident deſign of which is, that, conſidering the various tempers of men, their different views, paſſions, prejudices, their ſelfiſhneſs, ambition, vanity, and the like, it was natural to expect, that they would divide into parties about *religion*, as well as about *politics*, and the *civil* affairs of life; and that the providence of God wiſely permitted this for the trial of their *integrity*, and to diſtinguiſh the indolent, careleſs, and inſincere from the

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SERM. XI. real friends of truth, perſons of an honeſt, inquiſitive, and ingenuous temper.

Now, according to this account, the general notion of an heretic is no more than this, *viz.* one that ſets up to be the *head*, or *chooſes* to join himſelf to a particular religious ſect. I ſay who makes this the matter of his *choice*, becauſe it is implied in the original ſignification of the word; and beſides, nothing can be ſuppoſed to have any concern with religion, but what is a *voluntary* action. An heretic therefore, in a bad ſenſe, muſt be one, who *knowingly* eſpouſes a falſe doctrine, is *inſincere* in his profeſſion, and aſſerts and defends what he is *convinced* is contrary to Chriſtianity, and, conſequently one, who maintains and ſupports the intereſt of a faction, to ſerve ſome baſe deſigns. This will appear, beyond diſpute, when we have conſidered the text, and compared it with the general tenour of the New Teſtament.

According to St. *Paul*'s account in the Text, an heretic is not only *ſubverted*, or turn'd aſide from the true faith; he not only entertains wrong ſentiments of Chriſ-

Chriſtianity; but *ſinneth*, i. e. doth this *wilfully*, and with an *ill* intention. Such as have merely an erroneous judgment can't be here meant, becauſe errors of the underſtanding, conſider'd in themſelves, are not *criminal*, but naturally ariſe from the weakneſs and fallibility of human reaſon. They are, in moſt caſes, *involuntary*, in many *unavoidable*. And, therefore, as all moral evil depends upon the error and obliquity of the will, the perſons, deſcribed by the Apoſtle as *ſinners*, muſt be *wilful* corrupters and oppoſers of the Chriſtian religion; ſuch whoſe minds are perverted by irregular diſpoſitions and appetites; and who have reſolved to ſacrifice truth and virtue to the gratification of their ſenſual deſires. And that this is the real caſe appears farther from hence, that the crime ſpoken of in the text is of ſuch a nature, as required not *inſtruction*, but *admonition*; from hence, I ſay, it evidently follows, that the fault lay in the *will*, and not in the *underſtanding*. For every one knows, that the only way to rectify a miſtaken judgment is by the uſe of rea-

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son and argument, by exposing the false grounds on which it is formed, removing prejudices, and representing matters in a clear and proper light; and that to advise a man, in an authoritative way, and without informing his understanding better, to alter his apprehension and judgment of things, and expect to make a convert of him merely by telling him he is in the wrong, be it with ever so *solemn*, *imperious*, and *magisterial* an air, is to the last degree absurd and ridiculous. But he may, very rationally, be admonished, or reproved, with relation to those errors that depend intirely upon the *will*, and are owing to a *free choice*, because, in every such case, he must *know* himself to be out of the way, and has all the necessary means of a reformation in his own power. St. *Paul*, therefore, expresly mentions this circumstance, which renders that of an heretic a compleatly bad character, *viz.* that he is *condemn'd of himself*, or acts against the sense of his own mind, and the dictates of his reason and conscience. He is one that

that makes religion a cloak for his im- SERM. XI.
moralities, and eſpouſes and propagates what he knows to be falſe, to promote the ends of his ambition, coveteouſneſs, or ſenſual pleaſure; who, indeed, thinks it his intereſt to retain the *name* of a Chriſtian, and, in that circumſtance only, differs from a thorough and wilful *apoſtate* from Chriſtianity, but which incurs the greater guilt may, perhaps, be hard to determine; for as the one rejects the Chriſtian religion altogether, the other out of choice corrupts it, and oppoſes its true doctrines, even while he pretends to believe and reverence its authority. Such as theſe, I ſay, perſons of ſuch *vile* and *diſhoneſt* principles, and of ſo *flagitious* a character, are the heretics condemned by St. *Paul*; and, therefore, to fix it as a term of reproach on any, in whom there does not appear *hatred* of the truth, a *ſenſual* mind, and a *profligate* conſcience, muſt be unchriſtian and ſcandalous.

And if we examine other paſſages of the New Teſtament, we ſhall find that they all concur in giving us the ſame

SERM. XI. idea of hereſy. 'Tis repreſented as *a work of the fleſh*, becauſe it has its foun-
Gal. v. 20. dation in the corrupt inclinations of human nature. 'Tis reckon'd amongſt the moſt heinous and execrable vices, ſuch as *adultery*, *idolatry*, *hatred*, *variance*,
Ibid. *ſeditions*, *murders*. And heretics are conſtantly deſcrib'd as men of no *probity* or *honour*, ſtrangers to all the principles of virtue, and embracing ſuch opinions only as were calculated for the gratification of *irregular* appetites, and advancing *ſelfiſh* and *worldly* views. Thus St. *Paul* writes to *Timothy* concerning *Hymeneus* and *Alexander*, that, *having put away a good conſcience*, they had *made*
1 Tim. i. 19. *ſhipwreck of faith*. And of thoſe *falſe prophets*, of whom St. *Peter* foretold that they ſhould ariſe, *bringing in damnable hereſies*, this character is given, with regard to their prophaneneſs and impiety
2 Pet. ii. 1. towards God, that they would *deny the Lord that bought them*. The perſon here meant is not, as ſome apprehend, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but God the father, the ſupreme Lord and governour of the world, concerning whom *Moſes* put this queſtion

queſtion to the *Iſraelites, is he not thy fa-* SERM.
ther who hath bought thee? becauſe the XI.
Greek word, ſignifying *ſupreme* maſter, Deut.
or ruler, is never once uſed when Chriſt xxxii. 6.
is ſpoken of, but always of the Father; and, beſides, in the parallel text of St. *Jude*, the ſupreme Lord is expreſsly *diſtinguiſhed* from the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. His words are, *for there are certain men* Ver. 4.
crept in, unawares, who were before, of old, ordain'd to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into laſciviouſneſs, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. The monſtrous character of theſe heretics may be ſeen throughout this whole chapter of St. *Peter*, and almoſt to the end of St. *Jude*'s Epiſtle. And the ſame general repreſentation is given of them, in all the epiſtles of St. *Paul*, viz. that they deſigned not to *ſerve our Lord Jeſus Chriſt* Rom. xvi. 18.
but their own bellies; and taught *things* Tit. i. 11.
which they ought not for filthy lucre's ſake; *ſpeaking lies in hypocriſy, and having their conſcience ſeared with an hot iron.* And 1 Tim. iv. 2.
tho they might, ſometimes, put on the

SERM. XI. outward appearance of gentleneſs and humanity, they were ſtill, to uſe our Saviour's phraſe, but *wolves in ſheeps-cloathing*; and only endeavoured, under that ſpecious pretence, to diſguiſe their coveteouſneſs, rapine, and cruelty, till they might be more *conveniently* exercis'd. Having thus largely ſtated the ſcripture account of hereſy, ſuffer me to make ſome obſervations upon it. And,

Mat. vii. 15.

1*ſt*. It appears from what has been ſaid, that no *mere error* of the *judgment* can be hereſy. For hereſy is a high degree of wickedneſs; and neceſſarily ſuppoſes irregularity of the affections, and a deprav'd and vicious choice. Whereas erroneous conceptions and apprehenſions of things are no crime at all, but natural to mankind in the preſent weak and imperfect ſtate of their faculties. Nay, I think, it may be affirmed, not only that no *mere error* of the *judgment* can be hereſy; but alſo that there can be no hereſy, where there is, properly ſpeaking, *an error of the judgment*. This may be owing to lazineſs, prejudice, partial examination,

mination, and other very bad cauſes; but hereſy it cannot be as long as a man *believes* he is in the *right*, however he came to work himſelf into ſuch a perſuaſion. For an heretic, in St. *Paul*'s account, is one that *knows* he teaches and propagates a falſe doctrine; who does it *deliberately*, and againſt the clear ſuggeſtions and dictates of his conſcience; either from a principle of vanity, and to make himſelf conſiderable as the head and leader of a ſect; or to advance his temporal intereſt. SERM. XI.

2*dly*, We may infer from the foregoing diſcourſe, that no *honeſt* man can poſſibly be an heretic. He may, indeed, have *errors* (and who is there among us that has not) nay, he may err in points of *importance* too, but his miſtakes can't be *dangerous* while he takes care to maintain a good conſcience. For human nature is, in its very make and conſtitution, weak and fallible; and conſidering mens different capacities, turn of underſtanding, education, and the like, *different*, and, conſequently, *erroneous* ſentiments

SERM. XI. ments (for truth can't *vary* from itſelf, but muſt always be *conſiſtent* and *uniform*) I ſay different, and, conſequently, erroneous ſentiments ſeem to be unavoidable. And 'tis not to be doubted, but that the wiſe and merciful governour of the world will make great allowances for the imperfection of our knowledge, the confuſion of our reaſonings, and the many little prejudices that, *inſenſibly*, biaſs and miſlead the mind, in this ſtate of immaturity and darkneſs.

I would ask, particularly, what is the ground of our acceptance with God under the diſpenſation of the goſpel? Is it *abſolute perfection*, or *ſincerity*. If *perfection* be required of us, an exact and adequate knowledge of all the parts of the Chriſtian revelation, and a ſtrict invariable obedience to the precepts of it; or, in other words, if it be indiſpenſably neceſſary to our obtaining the divine favour, that we be free from all errors of the *underſtanding*, and from all defects in our *moral* conduct; the whole race of mankind muſt be *reprobated*,—

equally and neceſſarily ſubject to con- SERM. demnation. For *if we ſay that we have* XI. *no ſin*, and, conſequently, no erroneous judgments, from whence all irregular practices proceed, *we deceive ourſelves, and* 1 John i. 8. *the truth is not in us.* But if a *ſincere* deſire to know and do the will of God be the only condition of obtaining the Chriſtian ſalvation, as it muſt be, in the preſent circumſtances of mankind, unleſs our future happineſs depends upon an *impoſſibility*; muſt not all miſtakes, which are conſiſtent with *general ſincerity*, be conſiſtent, likewiſe, with a ſtate of *favour* with God? And, conſequently, if we condemn thoſe for *party-differences*, in whoſe lives there appear all the fruits of a good conſcience, and who give the greateſt evidence, that can reaſonably be deſired, of their being honeſt and impartial, by a ſteady purſuit of virtue, and an inflexible adherence to it under the utmoſt diſcouragements and difficulties, muſt not this be a *raſh* and *unrighteous* judgment. To proceed one ſtep farther, has not the ſcripture expreſsly declared, that *whoſoever believeth that* 1 John v. *Jeſus* 1.

SERM. XI. *Jeſus is the Chriſt, is born of God?* And ſhall we, then, inſiſt on *private articles* of our own, and right notions in *intricate* and *perplexing* controverſies; and preſumptuouſly pronounce all who have not the ſame ſtrength of underſtanding, the ſame opportunities and advantages for improving in knowledge, or perhaps only, the ſame *confidence* with ourſelves, to be forſaken of God, and mark'd out for deſtruction? The reſolving theſe few plain queſtions will ſoon ſhew a conſiderate mind the folly and danger of ſuch hard and unmerciful cenſures, which are evil, in a high degree, when they are only *raſh* and *precipitate*; and much more ſo, when they proceed from *malice*, and are accompanied with a *contemptuous* and *ſcornful* treatment of our brethren; but moſt of all, when thoſe who are ſo forward to condemn others for *ſpeculative* errors, are, themſelves, chargeable with *immoral* practices; for this is moſt impudent and monſtrous *hypocriſy*. And yet, how ſtrange and unaccountable ſoever it may ſeem, ſuch perſons are frequently the moſt noiſy and violent advocates

vocates for orthodoxy, either, perhaps, to *palliate* their vices, and ſcreen them from public view; or elſe, thinking to make ſome *atonement* for them by a fierce and outragious zeal for *trifles*. To theſe the words of our Saviour are immediately directed: *Why beholdeſt thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but conſidereſt not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou ſay to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, firſt caſt out the beam out of thine own eye, and then ſhalt thou ſee clearly to caſt out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* SERM. XI. Mat. vii. 3, 4, 5.

This framing Chriſtianity according to the model of *private opinions*, and *party peculiarities*, and impoſing them on conſcience under the penalty of eternal damnation, has been one of the moſt *ſucceſsful engines* againſt its cauſe and intereſt; and would, probably, were it not for the ſuperintendency of a watchful and all-powerful providence, have been, long ere this time, the *utter ſubverſion* of our holy religion. And nothing

SERM. XI. thing has been the inſtrument of more confuſion in the world, or of greater diſtreſs and injury to civil ſociety. I would therefore, was I capable, in order to poſſeſs your minds with *a juſt horror*, repreſent the prodigious evil of it in the ſtrongeſt and moſt pathetic terms.——Hence it is, that religion, among ſo many, is degenerated into *form* and *ceremony*, and that *a blind injurious zeal* ſupplies the place of the power of godlineſs.——From hence have ariſen ſo many *abſurd*, *inconſiſtent*, and *ſelf-contradictory* ſchemes of doctrine, which have expoſed our religion to contempt.——Hence alſo has proceeded hypocriſy, and a denying the truth, in conformity to the conſtitutions of men in power, in order to ſecure their favour, and avoid the cruel effects of their *religious vengeance*; and, conſequently, ſecret *infidelity* under the maſk of an outward profeſſion.——And as for treachery and oppreſſion, inveterate hatreds, bitter revilings, irreconcileable animoſities, poverty and ſlavery, private murders and public maſſacres, unſettling governments by tumults and inſurrections,

tions, and almoſt all other kinds of evil, have they not ſprang from *the ſame root of bitterneſs?*——Has not the charge of hereſy been thought a juſtification of ſuch vile enormities, as we may defy *irreligion*, or even *atheiſm itſelf*, to exceed?——And can any of us allow ourſelves in a practice, which is productive of ſuch infinite diſorder and miſery, if we have only the common ſeeds of *humanity* in our nature, much leſs if we regard the honour of the *Chriſtian religion?* SERM. XI.

3*dly*, If hereſy be an error of the *will*, and ſuch only can be guilty of it who are *condemn'd of themſelves*, how can we certainly know, in moſt caſes at leaſt, whether a man be an heretic or not? Let each of us put this queſtion to himſelf impartially, and if we can't anſwer it to our ſatisfaction, let us, however, learn thus much from our ignorance, to be *modeſt* in the cenſures we paſs upon others. Indeed, in the firſt age of Chriſtianity, when the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt were communicated, of which one was the gift of *diſcerning ſpirits*, this matter might be more eaſily decided. 1 Cor. xii. 10.

SERM. XI. decided. And *Titus*, particularly, to whom St. *Paul* directs the advice in the text, can't be ſuppos'd, conſidering his character and office, to have been without theſe powers. But what rule have we, now theſe extraordinary illuminations and aſſiſtances are *ceaſed*, by which to conduct ourſelves in inquiries of this nature?

If it be ſaid, that ſuch wicked deceivers are, generally, *known by their fruits*, and that their vitious lives will ſhew us by what views they are acted, and the vile deſign of their impoſture: I anſwer, that, even upon this ſuppoſition, I ſhould think it better that they be rejected for their *immorality*, which is notorious and palpable, than for *hereſy*, of which, perhaps, we can't ſo certainly judge. But what if they are ſo cautious as to keep clear of all *open* vices, and affect an air of *ſanctity*, in order the more effectually to ſecure their end; in ſuch caſes as theſe, I ſay, what can we do, be they ever ſo wicked in *principle* and *intention*, but leave them to God the ſupreme and only judge of conſcience? And ſince 'tis

ſo

ſo difficult for us, in moſt inſtances, certainly to judge of hereſy, why ſhould we be forward to charge it on our brethren, for every *trifling difference* of their ſentiments from ours? And, above all, why ſhould we be ſo *unrighteous* as to impute it to men of *honeſt* principles, and *exemplary* lives, who, as has been ſhewn, are quite the reverſe of the heretics mention'd in the New Teſtament; and, if St. *Paul*'s authority be of any weight, cannot poſſibly have incurr'd that guilt? SERM. XI.

But after all, the truths which they deny are ſo clear, and ſupported by ſuch evidence, as neceſſarily to approve themſelves to every honeſt and impartial inquirer; and therefore you are poſitive, that, notwithſtanding their ſeeming piety, and ſtrictneſs of outward morals, there is a *latent* corruption in their hearts, and they are influenced by ſome evil affection or other, tho it does not appear *publicly*; either by a love of ſingularity, pride, ambition, *&c*; or are under the power of ſome vitious prejudice. This is conſtantly ſaid by *bigots* and *enthuſiaſts*, and eſpecially by ſuch as are themſelves moſt

SERM. XI. in the wrong, notwithſtanding the moſt ſolemn and repeated declarations of their opponents to the contrary, and, conſequently, as it will *ſerve* for *either* ſide of *any* queſtion, can have no effect on ſober and conſiderate minds, but will be look'd upon as the reſult of *paſſion* and *partiality*. But beſides, why are we ſo conceited of our own underſtandings? Are we infallibly ſure that we are in the right? Modeſty forbids us directly to aſſert this, tho all ſuch reaſonings neceſſarily imply it. Or if we were, would it not be much more excuſable to ſuppoſe our neighbour's *judgment* weaker than ours, than to reproach his *honeſty*? I ſhall only add,

In the fourth and laſt place, that tho' it be a point of great nicety to judge of hereſy in particular inſtances, the perſons who come *neareſt* the character of the old heretics are *violent party-men*, who confine Chriſtianity to their own faction, and excommunicate all that take the liberty to differ from them; the *rigid impoſers* of human ſchemes of doctrine, and modes of worſhip, as *eſſential* branches

of religion, and *laws binding conſcience*; theſe, I ſay, are moſt like the heretics condemn'd in ſcripture, notwithſtanding their inſolence aud preſumption. The common people, indeed, who help to encourage and ſupport this ſpiritual tyranny, may be *innocent deluded.* enthuſiaſts; but the firſt *contrivers*, and the *conductors* of it, eſpecially when it appears to have a direct tendency to wealth, grandeur, and luxury, may juſtly be ſuſpected of *baſe* and *irregular* views; or, in the language of St. *Paul*, to be *men of corrupt minds, and deſtitute of the truth* who ſuppoſe *that gain is godlineſs.* A turbulent, factious, and perſecuting ſpirit is one of the *ſureſt marks* of hereſy. And when the ſubſtance of religion is placed in trifling ſpeculations, which have no manner of connection with virtue and morality, in abſtruſe incomprehenſible myſteries, or in outward ſhew and ceremony, we may certainly conclude, that if this does not proceed from a very *weak head*, it muſt ſpring from *a diſhoneſt heart.*

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1 Tim. vi. 5.

SERM. XI. In order, therefore, to keep at the *utmoſt diſtance* from hereſy, let us be modeſt and charitable in our cenſures, and not forward to faſten the infamy of it upon others. Let us fix on what party we will, even the *worſt* and moſt *erroneous*, and we ſhall find the greateſt reaſon to believe, that there are in it many perſons of real probity and virtue, notwithſtanding the *abſurdity*, or *dangerous tendency* of their principles. And therefore to condemn whole bodies, in the *groſs*, merely for their *diſtinctive opinions*, without conſidering that we ourſelves may be miſtaken, or making proper allowances, with reſpect to others, for the fallibility of human underſtanding, for prejudices of education, and the particular diſadvantages they may labour under, is not only a high ſtrain of *pride* and *arrogance*; it not only argues great *ignorance* of human nature; but is contrary to all the principles of *juſtice*, *truth*, and *goodneſs*, which, both the natural reaſon of our minds, and the Chriſtian revelation inculcate, as of indiſpenſable authority, and infinitely preferable to the moſt

moſt *ſound* and *orthodox* faith, and the largeſt extent of *ſpeculative* knowledge. For *tho' I underſtand all myſteries, and all knowledge, and tho' I have all faith, ſo that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly;——thinketh no evil;—— believeth all things, hopeth all things. Now the God of patience and conſolation grant you to be like-minded, one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus; that ye may, with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo hath receiv'd us, to the glory of God.*

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1 Cor. xiii. 2, 4, 5, 7.

Rom. xv. 5, 6, 7.

SERMON XII.

Of Schiſm.

1 COR. xii. 25.

That there ſhould be no Schiſm in the body, but that the members ſhould have the ſame care one for another.

HAVING, in my laſt diſcourſe, conſidered and explained the nature of *hereſy*, I intend, in this, to treat of *ſchiſm*, its almoſt inſeparable companion. It muſt indeed ſeem very ſtrange to every one, who is acquainted with the mild and amiable ſpirit of Chriſtianity, that the

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SERM. XII. professors of a religion, which so strictly enjoins gentleness, moderation, and universal charity, should be so forward to divide and crumble into *parties*, and oppose one another with so much *rage* and *violence*. This is quite unnatural as we are *men*, united by the bond of one common nature, one common interest; but much more out of character as we are *Christians*, whose peculiar distinction from professors of all other religions, if we act upon the principles that true Christianity inspires, will be mutual forbearance, harmony and peace. But yet the matter of fact is unconteſtable, and won't admit of any evasion. Selfishness, pride, the desire of dominion, a tyrannical imposing spirit, and sometimes perhaps (for I fear that has been but seldom the case) mere prejudice void of any direct ill design, have occasioned as great and dangerous factions in the *church*, as were ever fomented, by the same bad causes, against the security and peace of *civil government*. The Christian society has been split into infinite *divisions* and *subdivisions*, of separate and inconsistent interests, excommunicating, revi-

reviling, and almost always, when they had it in their power, *persecuting* each other; by which the common cause has been exposed and weakned; and Christianity itself, which is most admirably adapted to civilize mankind, to calm and soften boisterous and rugged tempers, and promote universal order and happiness, has been the means of irritating and inflaming their passions, and by a most strange and melancholy perversion of it, the source of discord, confusion, and misery. SERM. XII.

And what is it that has been the *main subject* of the most bitter, uncharitable, and outrageous contentions? That has rais'd so many *factions* under the name of Christian societies? And not only destroy'd the peace and communion of the church, but in many cases, broke through all the ties of friendship, natural affection, and common humanity?——Have these evils sprung from a zeal for the eternal and unchangeable obligations of *morality?*——From a concern for *justice, truth*, and *mercy*, or an emulation to excel in *substantial* and *useful* virtue?——

Quite

SERM. XII. Quite the contrary. Almost all the schisms and disturbances that have happen'd in the Christian world (and *church-history* furnishes us with a pretty large catalogue) have been about *mere trifles*, things of very little consequence to true Christianity, and often-times repugnant and dishonourable to it; such as, submission to *ecclesiastical* authority, the belief of *mysteries* of which we have no ideas, and conformity to rites and ceremonies of *human* institution, which serve but to *encumber* and *debase* the rational worship of the Deity, and render it *weak* and *superstitious*. Thus we find, that very soon after the Apostolic age, a *little insignificant* and *senseless* controversy, about the day of keeping *Easter*, occasioned a terrible confusion and schism in the Christian church; the *western* churches separating, and renouncing communion with the *eastern*, for several years together. And have not some of the hottest disputes since been about the *secret decrees* of God, and metaphysical subtilties relating to his *essence*, and manner of *subsisting*, about the *validity* or *nullity* of ministerial ordinations,

tions, praying with, or without a *form*, *bowings*, *crossings*, *garments*, and other outward modifications of piety, which are but the *circumstantials*, and very inconsiderable ones, at best, of religion; and can't, in my judgment, be reckoned *essential*, or even *important* branches of any religion that is fit for mankind to observe, or their maker to require, without entertaining very *low* thoughts of the wisdom of God, and a most *contemptible* opinion of human nature. And since these divisions among Christians are such a reproach to their character, and have been urg'd as objections against the excellent doctrine they profess, which is the most *benevolent* and *peaceable* that ever appear'd in the world; since they have produc'd, and will always necessarily produce, the most mischievous and fatal effects, injurious to true piety and virtue, and to the interest of civil society; and finally, since, in almost every controversy, we find both the contending parties forward to charge the *schism* on each other, as indeed it is too natural, when the passions are strongly engag'd, for both to

run

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run *unwarrantable lengths* in the heat of their animoſity and oppoſition; upon theſe accounts, I ſay, it muſt be of equal advantage to us to form right notions of ſchiſm, as of hereſy. That, on the one hand, we may never incur the guilt of a crime ſo aggravated, (when it is at all a crime) and attended with ſuch deſtructive conſequences; nor, on the other, be at all alarm'd at it, when it is only *a mere name*, and *brand of infamy*.

Schiſm, in its original ſignification, is no more than a *rent*, or a *diviſion*. Accordingly in all the paſſages of the New Teſtament, except the text, where the words σχισμα and σχισματα are uſed, they are thus rendered by our tranſlators. So we read, in one of our Saviour's alluſions, that *a piece of new cloth, put to an old garment, taketh from the garment, and the* rent *is made worſe*. We read likewiſe of a *diviſion*, or ſchiſm, *among the people*, i. e. of their entertaining different ſentiments of Chriſt. Several other paſſages might be added, but theſe two are ſufficient to ſhew, that the word ſchiſm,

Matt. ix. 16.

John vii. 43.

as

as well as heresy, is us'd in an *indifferent* SERM. sense; and that the lawfulness, or unlaw- XII. fulness of it, is entirely to be determined by *circumstances.* Common use indeed, in our own language, always affixes to the term an idea of *guilt*; and therefore I am obliged in the following discourse, in order to adapt it to modern disputes, to consider it as a *criminal vitious* thing, and shall endeavour to state the true notion of it under that character. In general, then, there can be no such thing as schism but in cases where there is an obligation to *unity* and *communion*; so that in order to define the nature of it justly, we must find out some *center* of union, which is common to all Christians. And this must be either *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of speculative belief, or in external modes of worship and discipline; or else, if it be unreasonable to expect either of these, the only center of unity that remains is *charity* and *mutual forbearance*, notwithstanding lesser differences, where there is an assent to all the necessary principles of Christian faith,

SERM. XII. faith *, and the profession of Christianity is prov'd to be sincere by a regular and virtuous life.

Let us examine this matter distinctly. And,

* If it be ask'd, what these necessary principles are? The answer is easy, *viz.* that unless we will leave room for multiplying articles of faith *infinitely*, they can be no other than what are expresly requir'd to be believ'd, in order to our obtaining the Christian salvation. And of this kind we find nothing in the whole New Testament but that *single* article, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of "God," including in it the belief of his miracles, and resurrection, and the extraordinary powers communicated to the Apostles, which are the standing evidence of the truth of the Gospel. There are two passages, in St. *John*'s first epistle, so distinct, and full to this purpose, that they can't be evaded by any arts of criticism, but what will confound and darken the plainest sense of words, and destroy the very use of language: *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God*; chap. iv. 15. and again, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*, chap. v. 1. So that every one that assents to this fundamental truth, and sincerely endeavours to understand the revelation, and act according to it, must be a true Christian, and intitled to the *friendship* and *communion* of Christians; and to deny him this priviledge, on *whimsical* notions of the importance, or necessity of particular schemes, not *expresly* warranted and supported by scripture, is unjust, antichristian, and *schismatical*.

I. As

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I. As for *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of *speculative belief*, that can never be the *common center* of Christian unity, because it is in the nature of things *impossible*. For in order to this, all mankind must have exactly the same strength of understanding, the same advantages, the same manner of education, the same passions, prejudices, and interests; but as there is an almost *infinite variety* in all these respects, differences of opinion will necessarily arise; and the contrary can't be hop'd for by any one that knows human nature, much less can it be required by the infinite wisdom of our supreme governour. Besides if all Christians must concur in the same way of thinking about every controversy in religion, whose opinion shall prevail; and be made the *public standard?*——Are the *majority* to decide for us?——How shall we determine, without collecting the vote of every individual, who are the *majority?*——The greatest numbers in our own, or any other particular country, may be the *minor* part with respect to the

SERM. XII. the whole body of Christians; and, besides, the *real sense* of the people may be very different from established forms, and in many instances, from their own public profession. But allowing we could settle this first and most essential point, which, in truth, can hardly be settled, are the majority always in the *right?* Or must we, for the sake of uniformity, profess (*believe* we cannot) against truth and reason? Will not this make all religion *dissimulation* and *hypocrisy?* Will it not drive us back to all the errors and superstitions of *Popery?* Nay, will it not oblige us to renounce even Christianity itself for the *Mahometan* imposture, or *Pagan* idolatry, both of which, if the vote of the *majority* is to determine, seem to stand upon a much better foundation? This is undoubtedly the point in which this principle must terminate, if pursued through all its just and natural consequences; for the *majority* of Christians have no more a right to judge for the *whole body* of Christians, than the *greatest part* of mankind for *all the rest* of mankind.

But if *uniformity* of opinion can't be secured in this way; shall we not be govern'd by the most *learned* and *pious* Christians, who are neither influenced by irregular passion, nor sway'd by criminal prejudice, and have examin'd all the parts of religion with the greatest exactness and impartiality? I answer, that who are *really* the most learned and pious will be matter of endless dispute, and can never be *certainly* fix'd. Or if it could, there is still this objection against admitting their judgment as a *decisive* rule, that they are *fallible* as well as others; and have frequently asserted and maintain'd such principles, as derogate highly from the honour of God, and are of vast disservice to religion.——Must we then give up the direction of our faith to our *spiritual instructors*, the *governours* of the church? This will leave us in equal confusion and uncertainty.——For who are they? ——If the *ecclesiastics* of every nation are to appoint and settle the *national* faith, there is likely to be the same *variety* and *inconsistency* in it, as if it was left to every man's own private reason; or if

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SERM. XII. the greateſt number are to fix the *general* faith of Chriſtians, we muſt give up our *underſtandings*, our *ſenſes*, our *humanity*, for the follies and cruelties of *Popiſh* ſuperſtition. Or finally, if we are to ſubmit to the religion of the *civil magiſtrate*, exactly the ſame conſequences will follow from it; the ſame *inconſiſtency* of principles and practices, all ſuppos'd to be eſſential parts of the one true religion (which by the way, is making religion itſelf a *contradiction.)* For this way of eſtabliſhing *uniformity* of opinion under one government will, in different countries, as neceſſarily eſtabliſh a *variety*; and be, withal, of equal, nay of much greater ſervice to *Mahometaniſm*, and *Heatheniſm*, than to the cauſe of Chriſtianity. It appears then from what has been ſaid, that to endeavour to bring all mankind to the ſame ſentiments in matters of religious controverſy is an *abſurd*, *romantic* ſcheme, and repreſents religion as nothing elſe but outward *formality*, *artifice*, and *craft*, or a mere piece of *ſtate-convenience* and *policy*.

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The same may be said of *uniformity* in *external modes* of worship and discipline, *viz.* that this, likewise, cannot be a necessary term of Christian communion. For it will be altogether as difficult to determine, who are to settle external rites and ceremonies, and forms of church-government, as articles of speculative belief; and the very same wild consequences will follow, from allowing it to the *majority*, the *church*, or the *civil magistrate*, in one case, as in the other. Besides, the lawfulness, expediency, or divine authority of any particular form is as much a matter of *private* opinion and speculation, as the truth or falshood of doctrinal propositions; and, therefore, it is as natural to expect a *variety* of sentiments about it. SERM. XII.

Indeed the plain truth of the case lies here. Every man has an *unalienable* right to judge, for himself, what principles are just and rational, and what form of religion is most acceptable to God. It is absolute nonsense to talk of any thing in religion, that is not entirely founded on inward *conviction*, and

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choice. If we exclude this, and ſuppoſe that private perſons are bound to ſubmit to a *public* conſcience, and to *eſtabliſh'd* notions of order and decency, we build religion on the *ruins* of human reaſon; and may indeed make it *any thing*, be it ever ſo weak and trifling, ever ſo much miſchievous and hurtful, ever ſo contrary to the moral perfections of God, and the immutable principles of truth and righteouſneſs. And at this rate is it worthy *a wiſe* man's concern? Can it deſerve to be *ſupported?* Would it not rather be for the intereſt of mankind, if it was abſolutely *baniſh'd* the world? On the contrary, if it be (as it muſt if it be any thing at all) a *perſonal* thing, and all are at liberty to judge and determine for themſelves, in every circumſtance, what is fit and proper; and if Chriſtianity makes no alteration in mens *natural rights*; the inference to be made from hence is moſt obvious and undeniable, *viz.* that no mere difference of opinion, either in matters of ſpeculative belief, or about outward forms of worſhip and diſcipline, can deſtroy neceſſary Chriſtian unity, which

which, upon every other supposition, is a *chimera*, an absolute *impossibility*. SERM. XII.

If this be allow'd, it may be ask'd, what will become of *public order*? I answer, what is *public order?* It can't be *uniformity* in matters of mere opinion, for that has been shewn to be impossible; and there will be no more *disorder* from a variety of sentiments in religion, than from different schemes of philosophy, politics, oeconomy, or different rules of civil life; nay, than from the difference of mens faces, natural tempers, circumstances, or the infinite variety that appears in the constitution of the universe, which yet, upon the whole, is perfectly *harmonious* and *beautiful*. The *right order* of things with respect to mankind, who are intelligent beings, and indu'd with moral powers, is, when *every individual* exercises his reason, and forms his notions of religion for himself, and the more strictly this *order* is preserv'd, differences, in lesser matters, will be more unavoidable and necessary.——They are only *imaginary* rules of order of human contrivance, perverting the *natural order*

SERM. XII. that God has eſtabliſh'd, with which ſuch differences are at all inconſiſtent.

Let me add to this, that a *variety* of ſentiments in religion, while moderation and mutual charity are maintained, can do no hurt, as well as create no confuſion; whereas an attempt to introduce *public uniformity*, and the impoſing *unſcriptural* terms of communion, have been a conſtant ſource of ſchiſms in the church, and as long as they continue, will infallibly keep alive a ſpirit of animoſity, and perpetuate contention and violence.

And finally, when there is a *difference* of opinions, and a *variety* of outward forms, this is juſt ſuch a ſtate of things as a wiſe man would expect, if all were *honeſt* and *impartial* inquirers; whereas if *one ſett* of principles, and the *ſame ſcheme* of worſhip and diſcipline, not diverſify'd in the minuteſt circumſtance, were univerſally to prevail, it would not look like *human nature*; it would have nothing of the appearance of *ſincerity*; and, conſequently, muſt lead an indifferent ſpectator to conclude, that religion was all *complaiſance*, *courtlineſs*, and *carnal policy*, and

and did not spring from a conviction of the understanding, or a free deliberate choice. SERM. XII.

From what has been said I would make a few observations, relating to the nature and guilt of schism, and so conclude. And,

1*st*. It appears, that let there be ever so many *differences* amongst Christians, as long as *mutual charity* is preserv'd, there cannot be the guilt of schism. Even the church of *Rome*, so corrupt as it is, and so grosly as it has perverted the doctrines and institutions of the Christian religion, would not be *schismatical*, if it did not confine Christianity to its own faction, and make party-peculiarities necessary terms of communion; and thereby renounce all friendship and unity with Christians of a different persuasion. A man that holds the common faith of the Gospel, leads a holy life, behaves peaceably, and has charity for all, notwithstanding the little varieties by which they are distinguished from each other, does not differ from any church so far as it is form'd on the *essential* principles

SERM. XII. of Chriſtianity; but only takes that liberty of judging for himſelf, which *reaſon* allows, and *revelation* confirms to him; a liberty to differ from *fallible* expoſitions of ſcripture, from *civil* conſtitutions, or *eccleſiaſtical* ordinances of rather leſs authority. For if any perſon's judgment ought to be ſubmitted to as a *public* ſtandard, it ſhould certainly be that of the civil magiſtrate; who, generally ſpeaking, muſt have leſs temptation, than thoſe who pretend to a *diſtinct* and *independent* juriſdiction, to introduce ſuch ſchemes of religion as are injurious to mankind, and deſtructive of the ſecurity, order, and happineſs of ſociety. So that *alienation* of affection, and a *turbulent, excommunicating* ſpirit, are the eſſence of ſchiſm, and not mere difference of opinion; not the uſe of *different* ceremonies, or of *no* ceremonies at all; or joining ourſelves to any particular religious communion. For, according to St. *Paul*, (who, in ſeveral paſſages, blames the *Corinthians* for diviſions or ſchiſms among themſelves, in the ſame community) this crime may be committed where there

there is no separation from a particular church. And consequently they that *differ uncharitably*, whether they belong all to one, or form distinct worshipping assemblies (and they alone) are schismatics; and to throw the odium and infamy of this character on any *peaceable* denominations of Christians, is mere scandal and calumny. SERM. XII.

2*dly*, Differences among Christians are not only *innocent*, while unity of affection is preserved, but there are many cases, in which a separation from a particular church is absolutely *necessary*. This is universally allow'd when its worship is *idolatrous* or *superstitious*, or it requires *unlawful* terms of communion; and therefore I shall insist no longer upon it, but only observe, that what is an idolatrous or superstitious worship, or what are *really* unlawful terms of communion, can't be determin'd by any *public* authority, but must be left to the *private judgment* of every man's mind. And, consequently,

In the third place, none who are truly *honest*, who are not sway'd by irregular passions, or vicious prejudices, but, upon a deliberate impartial inquiry, according

to

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to their capacity and advantages, think themſelves oblig'd, in *conſcience*, to diſſent from their brethren; no ſuch perſons as theſe, I ſay, can poſſibly incur the guilt of *Schiſm.* For this would be to make *honeſty itſelf* a crime; and at the ſame time that we ſuppoſe it a man's duty to act according to the light and directions of his conſcience, to reproach and condemn him for it. Particular ſcruples may indeed be *groundleſs*, the judgment we form, and upon which we take the liberty to ſeparate from others, may be *erroneous*; but are there no allowances to be made for the weakneſs and fallibility of human reaſon? Is not this every honeſt man's *misfortune*, rather than his *fault?* Will not the merciful governour of the world overlook it? And ſhall not we treat ſuch a one with candour and humanity, notwithſtanding his *involuntary* errors?——Or ſhall we run him down with reproach and infamy?——If men of real integrity may be ſchiſmatics purely for being miſtaken, and having an over-ſtrict and ſcrupulous conſcience, ſchiſm muſt be perfectly *innocent*, becauſe it always

always has been, and ever will be, in innumerable cases, *unavoidable*. Or if it be still insisted on that such differences are highly criminal, and displeasing to God, tho they are not, at all, the matter of our *choice*, this will be to make guilt and misery necessary; which, if it was really a doctrine of Christianity, must be such a strong *intrinsic* mark of imposture, so absolutely contrary to all our notions of the wisdom, and justice, not to say the goodness of God, that no miracles, how *great* or *numerous* soever, would be sufficient to establish its authority. SERM. XII.

But is it not our duty to sacrifice a few scruples for the *peace* of the church? ——Not one.——For if the peace of the church can't be secur'd without giving up conscience, honour, and integrity, it is better it be *disturbed*; better there were *no church at all*, than that the cause of true piety and virtue should suffer by it. Besides, how is this peace broken by the scrupulous dissent of an honest mind from establish'd opinions, and forms of worship, while he behaves *charitably*, and is content with enjoying his own liberty, without

SERM. XII. without *insulting* and *censuring* others? Nothing, surely, can hinder, but the *church* may be at peace as well as the *state*, notwithstanding a variety of sentiments and manners, unless it be that the *imposing party*, who call themselves the church, are resolv'd there shall be no peace, till all submit to their authority, and comply with their humours and prejudices; till they have brought about an uniformity in *trifles*, that have not the least relation to true Christianity; which is a *monstrous* attempt in itself, and, if ever it prevails, will probably banish religion and virtue out of the world, to make way for outward form and hypocrisy. I may add, that the *modesty* of such persons is very extraordinary, as well as their inclination to an harmony and union with their brethren, who can desire *them* to act against their consciences for the sake of peace, *i. e.* in other words, only to silence their own unreasonable clamours, who are determined to be satisfy'd on no softer terms; and yet refuse to abate a few *indifferent* ceremonies, (which are of no use in religion but to engender strife

strife and variance, and which they have no pretence of *conscience* for keeping) to remove offence from honest minds, and thereby restore the public tranquillity. In all such differences as these, if there be really the guilt of schism, it will not fall on men of *scrupulous integrity*, who cannot, without forfeiting their virtue, comply with what is requir'd of them; but on the *rigid imposers* of human schemes, who by their stiffness cause the division, and all the rancour and animosity that attends it *.

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Nay, even tho the terms of communion, with any particular church, are allow'd to be *lawful*, it does not from thence follow, that I am oblig'd to worship

* It may be thought, perhaps, that, in some things, I have confounded heresy with schism, and schism with heresy. I think it proper therefore just to observe, that tho' the two ideas are really distinct, so that a man may espouse the interests of a particular faction against true Christianity, without going so far as to renounce communion with other Christians, and therefore without being a *schismatic*; and on the contrary, may be the cause of very unnecessary, uncharitable, and fatal divisions in the church, and yet not act against conscience, nor, consequently, be, in the sense of St. *Paul*, an *heretic*; notwithstanding, I say, that

SERM. XII. ship statedly with it; but if I think the constitution and manner of worship, in other churches, more *expedient* and *useful*, I am certainly at full liberty, as a *man*, and a *christian*, to join with them. My differing from the *majority* does not break the peace, if I act with moderation and candour; I do nothing but what I have a *right* to do, and am not answerable for *accidental* consequences; but the whole guilt of them must ly at their door, who take occasion, from an *innocent* circumstance, to foment a spirit of *faction* and *discord*. Not that I am against a *compliable* temper, in order to reconcile religious differences; but there is no reason that the compliance should be all on *one side*. We ought not to submit too *tamely*, for fear of establishing

that these things may *possibly* happen, 'tis undeniable that both these crimes *frequently* meet in the same characters, and natural to expect that they will, *generally*, go together. And this I take to be a sufficient justification of what I have advanc'd, *viz.* that a *violent party-spirit*, that puts men upon *excommunicating* and *unchristianing* the rest of the world, is the true nature and highest guilt of *schism*; and for the reasons alledged, under the last head of the foregoing discourse, one of the most *suspicious* marks of *heresy*.

arbitrary power; and I can't but think that it may be of great use, to stand up against unwarrantable incroachments and impositions, for the sake of the *common rights* of mankind, which are thereby invaded. But when those who separate become censorious and rigid, when they think of themselves as the only Christians, and confine their affection and esteem to persons of their own sentiments and party, tho' their *separation* might be justified, if they had conscience to plead, their *uncharitableness* makes them schismatics. So that as there are cases, in which only *one* side is guilty of schism, there are others in which *both* are chargeable with it, the imposers of human forms, and those who dissent from them; *viz.* when they condemn, reproach, and uncharitably refuse communion with each other. SERM. XII.

Upon the whole, would we avoid the guilt both of *heresy* and *schism?*——Let us be *honest* and *peaceable.*——In all the differences which we may have with our brethren, let us act with moderation, and maintain an humble, charitable, condescending temper.—Tho' they may require

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require such things of us, as may hinder our joining with 'em in *their* communion, let us keep open *our own*; and be ready to receive *sincere* Christians of *every* denomination.——And when we have done all, that is in our power, to *preserve* or *restore* peace, we may patiently bear the abuses of *slanderous* tongues; and leave bigots, and the advocates for church-power and imposition, to the *tortures* of their own *narrow*, *gloomy*, and *restless* minds, and the *contempt* they will certainly meet with, from all the *rational*, *good natured*, and *ingenuous* part of mankind.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

Of the pleaſures of a religious life.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are *ways of pleaſantneſs; and all her paths* are *peace.*

THESE words are a part of *Solomon*'s deſcription of the advantages of *wiſdom*, or true religion, which, contrary to the general method of this book (compos'd for the moſt part of independent ſentences) he purſues in a connected diſcourſe. He begins the chapter with recommending a ſtrict regard to the rules

SERM. XIII. of virtue from this conſideration, that 'tis the moſt likely way to ſecure *eſteem* and *influence*, and a *long*, *happy*, *honourable* life. The ſame argument is reſumed at the 13th verſe; and the whole is wrought up with ſo much *beauty* and *elegance*, that I chooſe to give it in the language of the wiſe author himſelf: *Happy* is *the man* that *findeth wiſdom, and the man* that *getteth underſtanding. For the merchandize of it* is *better than the merchandize of ſilver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days* is *in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways* are *ways of pleaſantneſs; and all her paths* are *peace.* I ſhall only add by way of introduction, that if the argument from *pleaſure* appears to be on the ſide of religion, it may be hoped its efficacy will be *univerſal*; ſince a deſire of happineſs is an *inextinguiſhable* principle in human nature, and one of the moſt powerful motives, by which the bulk of mankind are determin'd. In my following diſcourſe, I ſhall

I. Pre-

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I. Premiſe a few things, very briefly, for explaining and illuſtrating the obſervation contained in the text. And then, which is the chief part of my deſign, proceed to ſhow

II. The *peculiar excellency* of the pleaſures of religion and virtue.

The *firſt* thing that I would premiſe is, that what is here ſaid of the pleaſures of religion ſuppoſes that perſons are, in ſome degree, *inured* to the practice of it, and have a virtuous diſpoſition and turn of mind. For without this there can be no more a taſte of *divine* and *moral* pleaſures, than of *animal* gratifications without the ſenſes. Every pleaſure muſt have its faculty of *perceiving*, ſuited and adapted to it. And therefore to thoſe who have led a diſſolute irregular life, the ways of religion are at firſt ungrateful and burthenſome; becauſe they not only oppoſe the current of the animal paſſions, but ſtubborn and inveterate habits; and ſo oblige them to offer, for ſome time at leaſt, a kind of *violence* to

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nature. But when corrupt appetites are ſubdued, vitious prejudices remov'd, and contrary principles fixed within us, then religion is *eaſy*, and the duties of it are *delightful*. And the pleaſures of piety, as will hereafter be ſhewn, are beyond compariſon the moſt excellent that human nature is capable of; ſuited to its dignity, worthy its exalted capacities, ſubſtantial and durable; ſo that when a man comes to practiſe it with *freedom*, he begins to enjoy himſelf, and his noble faculties in their right order, and lives in a manner agreeable to his high original, and the deſign of his creation. Nay, even the *controuling* licentious inclinations, as 'tis a *rational*, *generous*, and *manly* action, muſt of conſequence, notwithſtanding the trouble and mortification that attends it, afford much greater and more ſublime ſatisfaction to the mind, than any that can ſpring from an *indulgence* of them. Again,

2*dly*. In interpreting *Solomon*'s obſervation we muſt except *extraordinary* caſes; as we are oblig'd to do with reſpect to many other general propoſitions, which

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are only ſuppos'd to hold true in the common courſe of things. The caſe, for example, of *violent perſecution*, an evil indeed, that, upon the whole, happens but ſeldom, and may be avoided in part, even when a ſpirit of oppreſſion prevails, by a diſcreet and moderate behaviour, the caſe, I ſay, of *violent perſecution* muſt be particularly excepted; which may, in a great meaſure, deſtroy the natural advantages reſulting from the practice of virtue. However it can't be denied, that a very conſiderable pleaſure will ariſe from acting a *brave* and *ſteddy* part, and adhering inflexibly to our duty under the bittereſt reproaches and ſufferings; and the inward ſhame and uneaſineſs, which a man of a generous temper muſt feel, on a cowardly deſerting the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs, may *equal*, and ſometimes, perhaps, *exceed* the inconveniences that the good man labours under, and bears with a patient, firm, unſhaken mind, in maintenance of his integrity. SERM. XIII.

Finally, we are to underſtand the words of the text, not as ſpeaking of

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what is always *fact*, but of the direct and natural *tendency* of the thing. The pleaſures of religion may be deſtroy'd by *dark* and *gloomy* notions of it, or by the influence of a *melancholy* habit. But when there is nothing in mens particular complection, inclining to *ſpleen* and *dejectedneſs*, nothing in their ſcheme of religion, that leads to ſuperſtitious *rigour* and *ſeverity*, when its duties are rightly underſtood, and carefully practis'd, the genuine effect of it is inward compoſure and ſatisfaction: *Her ways* are *ways of pleaſantneſs*, *and all her paths* are *peace*. And, indeed, how can it be otherwiſe, when religion allows of all the innocent and deſireable pleaſures even of the *ſenſitive* kind, and by promoting the health of our bodies, and the chearfulneſs and ſerenity of our minds, *heightens* every other enjoyment; when 'tis nothing elſe but acting up to the *reaſon* and *truth* of things, an imitation of the moral perfections of God, and, conſequently, the *rectitude*, and *ſupreme dignity* of human nature; and will therefore procure for us the acceptance and favour of our great creator,

creator, and a glorious and eternal re- SERM. ward. Theſe neceſſary rules for under- XIII. ſtanding the text being premis'd, I proceed to ſhow,

2dly, The *peculiar excellency* of the pleaſures of religion and virtue; that they are the higheſt mankind are capable of; have every thing in them that can recommend any pleaſures to the purſuit of rational beings; and infinitely the advantage, in many reſpects, over all other enjoyments whatſoever. This I take to be the moſt neceſſary part of a diſcourſe on this ſubject; and the only conſideration that is likely to reclaim thoſe, whoſe judgments are perverted and darkned by a long indulgence of irregular affections. Even ſuch perſons, who are unhappily enſlaved to vice, will, I ſuppoſe, make no ſcruple of allowing, that there *may be* pleaſures in a religious life, and the ſtrict practice of virtue, where there is a *proper diſpoſition* of mind to reliſh them; nay, moreover, that where this is the *particular turn*, they may afford a much more agreeable entertainment than any other purſuits of a diffe-

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rent kind. But then they will be apt to plead, that mens pleaſures are as various as their *inclinations* and *tempers*, and the *prevailing principles* by which they are influenced; and, of conſequence, as they find in themſelves *a contrary taſte*, whether it be from nature, or cuſtom, the happineſs that is moſt *ſuitable* for them muſt lie quite another way; that they have no notion of any greater or more deſireable pleaſures, than what they *already* enjoy; and that it is unreaſonable to expect they ſhould give up thoſe delights which they have always been *uſed* to, and know the *ſweetneſs* and *value* of, for others which they never *experienc'd*, and perhaps ſhall never bring themſelves thoroughly to *approve*; nay, which, for ought they know, may have no real foundation in *nature*, but ſpring entirely from a *particular warmth* of *enthuſiaſm*, that only a few are capable of.

What method now muſt we take, to convince ſuch men of the weakneſs and ſophiſtry of their reaſonings, and that they miſerably deceive and impoſe upon themſelves?——Will it be ſufficient to tell

tell them barely, that there are pleaſures in the practice of *religion* and *virtue?*— To this they will anſwer, that there are pleaſures, likewiſe, in the purſuits of *ambition*, and *ſenſuality.*——The only way therefore that we can follow is to ſhew, that there is, in nature, a *difference* between the ſeveral pleaſures, to which mankind are addicted; that their particucular ſentiments, prejudices, affections, and habits don't *deſtroy*, or in reality at all *leſſen*, this *neceſſary difference*; and that the *ſuperiority* on all accounts, whether it be in reſpect of *purity*, *ſolidity*, *duration*, and every other circumſtance that can help to furniſh out the moſt *compleat* ſatisfaction, is on the ſide of the pleaſures of the virtuous man. And this I ſhall attempt to do in the remaining part of my diſcourſe; and hope, that tho' I muſt be oblig'd, by reducing this noble ſubject, which can hardly be exhauſted, within ſo narrow a compaſs, to treat of it *partially*, and *imperfectly*, ſufficient hints may however be ſuggeſted, to recommend a religious life not only to the *graver* and more *conſiderate* part

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of this audience, but even to thoſe, if there are any ſuch, who are of a *gayer* turn, and have no eſteem of any thing but as it contributes to their pleaſures.

I might begin with this, that the pleaſures of religion are *manly*; i. e. they are the exerciſe of our *nobleſt* faculties, and alone ſuited to the *diſtinguiſhing* capacities of human nature. Indeed it muſt be own'd, that ſenſitive gratifications are agreeable to *one part* of our frame, in which there are ſtrong appetites, planted by the all-wiſe creator himſelf, that demand ſuch gratifications; and, conſequently, they may, within certain bounds, be *innocently* and *regularly* indulg'd. But are theſe the *peculiar* pleaſures for which mankind were form'd, and indu'd with thoſe excellent powers that advance them ſo eminently above the animal creation? No one can bring himſelf to aſſert, or even to imagine this, who has ever conſider'd his own make and conſtitution. *Reaſon* and *reflection* are of very little uſe to us in ſenſual enjoyments; which are found, perhaps in much greater ſtrength and perfection, among the brutes, who have

have nothing of this *ſublime, over-ruling, directing* principle, but are led only by *inſtinct* and *appetite.* Nay, it is not a mere *poſſible* ſuppoſition, but highly *probable*, ſince theſe are the only enjoyments they are capable of; and, beſides, this further reaſon may be given, from the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, why mankind ſhould not have ſo *exquiſite* a taſte of pleaſures that depend on the bodily ſenſes as inferior creatures, *viz.* leſt their affections, which in the preſent ſtate are apt to be moſt *impetuous* and *extravagant* this way, ſhould be quite engaged and captivated by *lower* and *meaner* gratifications, to the neglect of much more *conſiderable*, even *intellectual* and *moral* pleaſures. It appears then, that the indulgencies of ſenſe are not the *peculiar* pleaſures of a man, and have nothing at all to do with his *nobleſt*, his *diſtinguiſhing* faculties. They are not, indeed, *unworthy* human nature in its ſtate of *minority*; but may as properly be call'd *brutal*, as *manly* pleaſures. On the contrary, the pleaſures of which we are capable by means of our rational nature,

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ture, are of an abſolutely different kind. They are the pleaſures of *piety*, *juſtice*, *gratitude*, *benevolence*, and a regular *ſelf-government*. Theſe therefore moſt *naturally* and *ſtrictly* belong to us as men, and, of conſequence, muſt be our *ſupreme* entertainment and delight. But perhaps it will have little influence, againſt ſtrong prejudice and habit on the ſide of vice, to ſhew that the pleaſures of religion are *manly*, and argue their *ſuperior excellency* from thence; I ſhall therefore endeavour to prove, that they are, *in their own nature*, preferable to all other enjoyments. And,

1*ſt*. The pleaſures of virtue ſuppoſe all thoſe *unruly paſſions* to be ſubdu'd, or, at leaſt, controul'd and moderated, which are the cauſe of the greateſt diſorders and miſeries in human life; all the *ſenſual paſſions* to be corrected, and kept within their juſt limits, that they may neither impair our health, corrupt and debaſe our minds, or injure our fellow creatures; all the diſorderly motions of *pride* and *envy* ſuppreſs'd; and the violent tranſports of *anger* and *revenge* check'd and reſtrained;

reſtrained; in ſhort every thing *calm* and *ſerene*, every affection and appetite obedient to the *ſtill dictates* of reaſon, and, conſequently, creating neither diſturbance *within*, nor confuſion *without*. The right government of the paſſions is an important and eſſential branch of virtue, and one of the chief pleaſures that attend the practice of it. For beſides the numberleſs vexations and inquietudes which it prevents, it is a ſedate, uniform, *ſelf-enjoyment*, that no affluence of *outward proſperity*, no ſplendor of *greatneſs*, no *ſtarts* and *flaſhes* of pleaſure, no *ſhort liv'd extaſies* can compenſate for the want of. Thus *compos'd* are the pleaſures of religion. But can the ſame be ſaid of any other pleaſures? Far from it. To inſtance only in *ſenſual* indulgences; while a man is moſt eager in the purſuit of them, he may pine away with envy, be toſs'd and agitated by furious reſentments, or rack'd with the torments of diſappointed ambition. Nay, they won't ſo much as remove the uneaſineſs, ariſing from the particular appetites to which they are immediately adapted; but as, before

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before enjoyment, they are *reſtleſs* and *violent*, by frequent gratification they become more *inflamed* and *inſatiable*.

2*dly*. It is another excellent property of the pleaſures of religion and virtue, that they will bear the *ſtricteſt review*, and improve upon *reflection*. Let a man examine, ever ſo carefully, the pleaſures he feels on having faithfully diſcharg'd his duty to God, and practiſed that reverence and ſubmiſſion, that love and gratitude, which are immutably due, from all rational beings, to the father of the univerſe, the eternal and inexhauſtible fountain of good; the pleaſures of impartial juſtice, and generous, diffuſive benevolence; or thoſe that ſpring from temperance and chaſtity, keeping all his paſſions under ſtrict government, and denying himſelf every irregular gratification, however agreeable to his warmeſt and ſtrongeſt inclinations: let him examine theſe pleaſures (I ſay) ever ſo carefully, and they will all appear to be worthy his moſt excellent faculties, the *dignity* and *refinement* of his nature. He will find himſelf ſo conſtituted, that it is impoſſible for

for him to avoid being delighted with the review of ſuch a regular, honourable, and amiable conduct; and there is nothing but a ſenſe of his defects, and not having cultivated theſe virtues in a higher degree, that can give the leaſt check to his inward ſatisfaction.—Every *new reflection* is a *repetition* of the pleaſure. SERM. XIII.

But the enjoyments of ſenſe, if purſu'd with the utmoſt prudence and moderation, will be found to be, at beſt, but *innocent*. There is nothing in them that ſhews the *excellency* of our conſtitution, above that of the creatures below us; and, conſequently, it is not in their nature to yield that generous and ſublime delight, that ariſes from exerciſes of piety and virtue. Nay there is, really, ſomething *mortifying* that attends a juſt eſtimate and conſideration of them; as they diſcover to us the *weakneſs* and *imperfection* of our preſent frame, and the *diſorders* to which it is liable. For by means of that very *animal* compoſition, which renders us capable of enjoyments of this kind, we are ſubject to innumerable in-

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conveniencies; not only to ungovern'd paſſions, and the fatal extravagancies that they continually produce, but to dejected ſpirits, confus'd and melancholy thoughts, ſickneſs, pain, and all the evils of mortality. And if the indulgences of ſenſe, even when they are moſt regular, yield ſo little comfort on a review, and are rather a *humbling* conſideration, than a ſource of real ſatisfaction to the mind; in what a diſagreeable light muſt the *exceſſes* of luxury and *vitious* pleaſure appear, upon cool and impartial reflection? Theſe, the natural conſequences of which, where there is not a hardned inſenſible temper, are nothing but *confuſion*, *ſhame* and *remorſe*, can't bear a compariſon with the rational pleaſures of religion, which, the more they are *conſidered*, muſt be the more thoroughly *approved*. Religious pleaſures are, of all others, the moſt *pure* and *unmixt*, not interrupted in the enjoyment with diſquieting ſuſpicions, nor ſucceeded by uneaſy terrors. And this is one of their nobleſt and moſt recommending properties; a property that can never belong to any enjoyments, however,

ever, for the *moment* they laſt, *tranſport-*
ing, however *applauded* and *admired*, that
reaſon condemns. And nothing can more
fully demonſtrate the folly of ſuch irregu-
lar indulgences than this, that it is abſo-
lutely impoſſible for any man to be hap-
py, whoſe favourite gratifications leave a
ſting behind them, who is *aſhamed* of
his conduct, and at *variance* with him-
ſelf.

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3*dly*. The pleaſures of religion depend entirely on *ourſelves*, and not on thoſe numberleſs accidents, which may either prevent, or blaſt, or entirely deſtroy all outward pleaſures:——Not on the *ſenſes*, which may loſe their quickneſs;——not on the *animal paſſions*, which may grow faint and languid;——not on the return of an *over-loaded* and *jaded* appetite;—— not on mutual *agreement* and *confederacy*;——not on *critical* ſeaſons, and *ſpecial* opportunities;——nor on the *jealouſies*, *paſſions*, and *oppoſite intereſts* of our fellow creatures. Theſe things have almoſt the ſole influence in forming, and diſpoſing of the pleaſures of the *ambitious* and the *ſenſualiſt*; but thoſe that

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ſpring from virtue are *free* and *independent*. Being ſeated in the mind, they may be enjoy'd in their greateſt refinement when the body decays, and the edge of all its appetites is blunted. The malice and power of the moſt formidable oppreſſors, who may take from us all the outward accommodations of life, can't deprive us of them——They forſake us not even in *ſolitude*.——But if we were baniſhed the ſociety of all mankind, a conſciouſneſs of our integrity while we convers'd in the world, and a reflection on the ſimplicity and rectitude of our manners, would furniſh out a *great* and *noble* entertainment. And as the pleaſures of a good life depend entirely on *ourſelves*, it is in our power to be always *increaſing* them by a greater proficiency in virtue; whereas thoſe of ſenſe are according to *fix'd* and *ſtated* laws of nature, by us unalterable. We may, indeed, animate and raiſe our *imaginations*, and promiſe ourſelves, *beforehand*, extraordinary ſcenes of delight; but with all our art can do but little, if any thing at all, to heighten the actual enjoyment.

Again,

Again, another very conſiderable recommendation of the pleaſures of religion is, that they can never be purſu'd to an *exceſs*:——Never beyond the moſt deliberate dictates of reaſon;—— never to bring a juſt reproach upon ourſelves;——or to the injury of others. On the contrary, the more we are imploy'd in theſe pleaſures, and, conſequently, in cultivating the ſolid principles of virtue, on which they are founded, the more ſhall we *enoble* and *exalt* our nature, and be more *extenſively* uſeful to mankind. But the *exceſſes* of other kinds of pleaſure are daily *notorious*, and fill the world with the utmoſt confuſion and miſery. They impair *health*, conſume the *ſubſtance*, bring infamy upon the *character*, introduce moſt deplorable diſtreſs into *families*, and violate the general peace and order of *human ſociety*. Inſtead of *inlarging* the mind, and inſpiring ſentiments of generoſity, their natural effect is to *enervate* and *ſoften* it, and render it unfit for all that is great and manly. In ſhort, they are, in this particular, quite the *reverſe* of the pleaſures of religion, that in every in-

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ſtance the greateſt difficulty is, to prevent their being carried to an *exceſs*: For without great prudence, care, and reſolution, they will infallibly be attended with moſt pernicious conſequences, and hurry us on to very fatal extremes.

5thly. Religious pleaſures are our *beſt*, our *only* ſupport, under the diſappointments and calamities of life. There are *leſſer* cares, which a perſon may poſſibly divert, at leaſt in ſome degree, by a courſe of intemperance and luxury; by conſtantly inflaming his paſſions, and doing his utmoſt to keep reaſon aſleep. But this is not ſo much the *patience* and *firmneſs* of a *man*, as the *ſtupidity* of a *brute*. And after all, as inſenſible as the ſinner may appear to be in the midſt of his affected gaiety, his mind may be *confus'd*, and an utter ſtranger to a *ſettled* chearfulneſs and peace. Or, however, there are ſome circumſtances, in which all outward comforts muſt fail him, and leave him quite deſtitute of relief. Let us ſuppoſe, for inſtance, that he labours under decays of nature, or is tormented with acute pains, or under the *immediate apprehenſions*

apprehenſions of death; in ſuch a condi- SERM. XIII.
tion as this, when he is altogether incapable of any of thoſe ſenſual gratifications, which he has always purſued as the ſum of his felicity, will the remembrance of *paſt* pleaſures refreſh and bear up his ſpirits? Quite the contrary. They muſt appear, at beſt, to be *inſignificant*, and *trifling*; and it is natural to expect, that a review of the guilty ſcene will *alarm*, and fill him with *horrour*, and render his other miſeries more heavy and inſupportable.

But the good man, who has acted as became him, and ſteadily adher'd to the rules of virtue and religion, has in all ſuch *critical ſeaſons* of diſtreſs, a ſolid and ſubſtantial ſupport. The integrity of his heart will keep him from *ſinking*. The perfect reſignation of his mind to providence will prevent his being *ruffled* and *diſcompos'd*. Nay, his pleaſures will not deſert him in the very *laſt extremity* of nature; but a ſenſe of his Maker's favour, and the proſpect of an happy immortality, muſt needs *alleviate* the weight of every affliction he ſuffers, and enable

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him to bear up, under the waſtings of a *ſhatter'd tottering* conſtitution, with *reſolution* and *conſtancy*. And, ſurely, nothing can be more deſirable than to have relief from *within*, when all is dark and gloomy *without* us.

Finally, the pleaſures of religion are of all others the moſt *durable*. We carry them always about with us, ready for uſe on every *emergency*. They are not enjoyed by ſtarts, nor require, in order to their being reliſh'd, dull and tedious intervals of indolence, or *painful expectation*; but are a *conſtant* fund of delight. They never *ſatiate*, never grow *flat* on frequent uſe; but rather more *ſtrong*, *freſh*, and *lively*.

But do any of theſe excellent properties belong to the pleaſures of the *Epicure*? Are they not *ſuperficial* and *momentary*? Do they not end in *loſs* of *appetite*, and a *ſtupid liſtleſſneſs* at leaſt, if not in confuſion and remorſe? Does not a too frequent repetition of them render them *heavy* and *unentertaining*, and, ſometimes, quite *nauſeous*, till the ſpirits are recruited, and the ſenſes recover their former quick-

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neſs? Will they not forſake us at death, and leave us intirely deſtitute of comfort in the eternal world? What then can be more wild and extravagant, than for a man to purchaſe them by debauching his *reaſon*, and forfeiting his *honour*, with the loſs of his *innocence* and *peace*; and the pleaſures of religion that will continue *for ever*, and be only *reviv'd*, *enlarg'd*, and *perfected*, in the future ſtate? SERM. XIII.

——Conſider this, be wiſe, *and ſhew yourſelves men.*——Give up the *baſe* and *unworthy* gratifications of vice and ſenſuality, for the *refin'd* and *godlike* entertainments of virtue; for the *calmneſs* and *evenneſs* of an upright mind; and the *exalted* pleaſure of doing good. ——Exchange the ſatisfactions of a *brute* for the joys of *angels*.——Be ambitious to partake of the happineſs of *God himſelf*.——This *reaſon*, and every principle of *generoſity* ſtrongly dictate: Nay, conſult even your *ſelf-love*, and that will direct to it. But if for the ſake of irregular enjoyments, which are *ſhort liv'd*,

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uncertain, and *ſuperficial*, you ſacrifice the *nobleſt* and *pureſt* pleaſures that human nature is capable of; your *folly* and *wickedneſs* muſt be both inexcuſable.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

Religion founded on reaſon, and the right of private judgment.

JOSH. XXIV. 15.

And if it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the LORD, chooſe ye this day whom ye will ſerve, whether the Gods which your fathers ſerved that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, *in whoſe land ye dwell: But as for me, and my houſe, we will ſerve the LORD.*

IN the former part of this chapter, *Joſhua*, having aſſembled the tribes of *Iſrael* together at *Shechem*, gives them a brief hiſtory of the aſtoniſhing acts of God in

SREM. XIV. their favour, from his firſt appearance to *Abraham* to their ſettlement in the promiſed land. He recounts the call of *Abraham* from idolaters, to the acknowledgment and worſhip of the one true God, with a view to preſerve, amongſt his poſterity, the grand principles of religion pure and uncorrupted; the unſettled condition of their great progenitor in the land of *Canaan*; the oppreſſion of their anceſtors in *Egypt*, and miraculous deliverance from thence by the hands of *Moſes* and *Aaron*, who were enabled to prove their commiſſion by ſuch awful credentials, as not only humbled the pride of the *Egyptian* king, and ſtruck terror into all his people, but were the fulleſt evidence of the ſupreme univerſal dominion, and irreſiſtible power of the God of *Iſrael*; and finally his wonderful conduct and ſupport of them in the wilderneſs, his deſtroying the idolatrous nations that ſet themſelves to oppoſe their paſſage, and fixing them, at length, in the poſſeſſion of that good land, which he had promis'd to give them for an inheritance. And from this ſeries of

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ſurprizing providences, *Joſhua* argues, in the 14th verſe, the obligations they were under to *fear the* LORD, to *ſerve him in ſincerity and truth*, and renounce all the idolatry of their *fathers*. But becauſe it was neceſſary that their religion ſhould be free and voluntary, he refers the matter entirely to their own determination, upon a review of the reaſons which he had offered, only declaring for himſelf and his family, that they would adhere to the acknowledgment and worſhip of the true God, whatever choice the reſt of the people might make: *And if it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the LORD, chooſe ye this day, whom ye will ſerve, whether the Gods whom your fathers ſerved that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the Gods of the* Amorites, *in whoſe land ye dwell: but as for me, and my houſe, we will ſerve the LORD.*

'Tis remarkable, that in this paſſage *Joſhua* takes it for granted, that if the *Iſraelites* revolted from the true God, they would fix in ſome form of religion or other; and not turn abſolute *atheiſts*, and caſt off all religion. And, indeed, the

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character of an Atheiſt would hardly be thought poſſible to happen amongſt mankind, who are reaſonable creatures, did it not appear in fact, that ſome have ſo darkned and defaced the reaſon of their minds, as to diſpute *firſt* principles, to queſtion even the exiſtence of a Deity, and banter the obligations of religion and virtue. From whence we learn, that as human nature is capable of a vaſt inlargement of its faculties, and of attaining to high degrees of moral perfection and excellence, it may alſo be ſunk into the loweſt ſtate of corruption and degeneracy. For the evidences of a ſupreme and ſovereign intelligence, the creator and governour, of the world, appear plainly every where. Earth, ſea, and air bear the ſtrongeſt teſtimony to this fundamental truth: *The heavens* likewiſe *declare the glory of God, and the firmament ſheweth his handy work.* By the exiſtence of *effects*, we are neceſſarily led to the acknowledgment of an eternal *firſt cauſe*; and the giving being to ſuch an infinite variety of creatures, the ſupporting and animating univerſal nature, the

the admirable order, and exquiſite uſes of the ſeveral parts of it, the preſerving ſuch an immenſe frame of things in conſtant and perfect harmony, making even the minuteſt parts ſubſerve the beauty of the whole natural ſyſtem, and the general good of the moral world; theſe, I ſay, are the cleareſt demonſtrations of the *infinite wiſdom* and *power* of the Deity. And from his infinite wiſdom, which muſt inform him at all times what is fitteſt to be done, and his infinite power enabling him with eaſe to effect it, and conſequently his conſummate and immutable happineſs, we may certainly infer his *moral perfection*; nay, that he is a being of *abſolute* and *neceſſary* moral perfection; who can have no temptation to violate any of the eternal rules of righteouſneſs, truth, and goodneſs, but will always purſue what is beſt upon the whole. And the duties, which *more immediately* relate to this ſupreme mind, naturally ariſe from the notion of his abſolute perfection, and univerſal preſerving and governing providence; as do thoſe of *juſtice* and *charity* from the circumſtances and neceſſities

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SERM. XIV. ceſſities of mankind, and the relations in which they mutually ſtand to each other; and the obligation to *temperance* and *ſelf-government*, from its neceſſary ſubſerviency to the above-mentioned great and indiſpenſable duties, and to the rectitude of our rational nature.

What can we think of the man then, who denies and reviles theſe plaineſt dictates of reaſon?——Who believes that a world, the parts of which are in a continual *flux*, and undergo innumerable *changes*, is a *ſelf-exiſtent* and *neceſſary* ſyſtem;——Or that a world, which has in its frame and ſtructure characters of the higheſt *wiſdom*, and moſt curious *deſign*, was formed by *chance*;——or that it can preſerve itſelf, and is independent on him that made it;——that mankind, who are *reaſonable* and *free* beings, and conſequently *moral* and *accountable* agents, are bound by no *law*, and have no inſpector and judge of their conduct;——that he who endued them with moral powers will take no cognizance whether they are *improved*, or *neglected* and *abuſed*;——and that virtue and vice

are mere *empty names*; —— What, I say, can we think of the man who maintains such gross absurdities, in opposition to the plain nature of things, and the almost unanimous sense of his fellow-creatures, but that he is an *irregularity*, a sort of *monster* in the human species, (whose distinguishing excellency it is that they are rational) and as such not fit even to be *supposed* to exist, till apparent and undeniable fact declares it? I proceed now to propose some other useful observations from the text, as the subject of my following discourse. And, SERM. XIV.

I. I observe that religion is a *voluntary* thing, and a matter of *choice*. Accordingly we find, that *Joshua* left it to the *Israelites*, if it seem'd *evil* to them *to serve the LORD*, to *choose*, for themselves, *whom* they would *serve*, in which he acted as one who had a just knowledge of human nature. For mankind are beings endued with *reason* and *liberty*; and *this alone* makes them capable of religion and virtue. Without these powers they would be upon a level with brute creatures, and 'tis the *right* or *wrong* exercise

SERM. XIV. erciſe of them that conſtitutes the *moral good*, or *evil* of actions; as will appear from the following conſiderations.

A man may have a good *natural diſpoſition* to juſtice, beneficence, a ſober and orderly behaviour, to meekneſs, peaceableneſs, and the like; but tho' theſe are important branches of a religious conduct, the *natural diſpoſition itſelf* is not religion, but the *prefering* it to the *contrary* temper, and *cultivating* and *improving* it by thoſe helps and motives which religion affords for that purpoſe; any more than a *natural tendency* to peeviſhneſs and ſudden paſſion is vitious and ſinful. The one is a misfortune like a *bodily defect*, or a *ſickly conſtitution*, but can't be deem'd a proper fault, becauſe 'tis *unavoidable* and *neceſſary*; and for the ſame reaſon the other, which, ſo far as it ſprings entirely from nature, is equally neceſſary, cannot be virtuous, or, in a *ſtrict* ſenſe, rewardable.

Again, what juſt foundation for praiſe is there in a man's being of the *true* religion, a *Chriſtian* ſuppoſe, by *chance?* without knowing the grounds of his religion,

gion, or the reaſon of his hope? merely becauſe his *anceſtors* were Chriſtians, and Chriſtianity is the *eſtabliſh'd* religion? *i. e.* upon the ſame foot as he might have been of a *falſe* religion, a *Mahometan*, or an *Idolater*. Such a man's faith, tho' by a *fortunate accident* of the moſt excellent kind, is no more a virtue than a good *natural complection*, or the happy *ſituation* and *temperature* of the country where he was born. Indeed the truths, which he was thus *born* to the knowledge of, may be of great uſe to him, as they may be the foundation of a more perfect morality than they can be expected to arrive at, who are deſtitute of ſuch advantages, whole lot is caſt in the more dark and uncultivated parts of the world; but the *faith*, from whence theſe better morals proceed, has, conſidered in itſelf, no more real merit in it than the *ignorance* of an uninſtructed infidel. Whereas not only the *morality*, but the *faith* of one, who is of the true religion from conviction and choice, is virtuous and commendable, becauſe it is acquired by the exerciſe and improvement of his

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rational faculties; and on the contrary, the *errors* which ſuch a perſon may fall into, after proper care to avoid them, and ſincere endeavours, in the uſe of all the neceſſary means, to come to the knowledge of the truth, will not be of any great *conſequence* in themſelves, nor *dangerous* to his happineſs. So that, in many caſes, 'tis better to *err* with an honeſt, unbyaſs'd, inquiſitive mind (for this is oftentimes the natural effect of human infirmity, where there is the *beſt* temper, and a true *rectitude* of the will and affections) than to be in the *right* from cuſtom, and an implicit reverence for tradition and authority; eſpecially, if with a ſound and orthodox faith, there be join'd a narrow diſpoſition, neglect of free and rational enquiry, pride, prejudice, and cenſoriouſneſs, which are the direct and immediate ſources of *error*, but can be of no poſſible ſervice to the cauſe of *truth*.

But farther, that our religion is only ſo far praiſe-worthy, as it is the matter of our *choice*, is evident from hence; that a man may perform an action that is

is in itſelf *good*, for example, an act of *beneficence*, and yet if he does not chooſe to do it as a *kind beneficent* action, but from ſome other motives in which *religion* and *virtue* are not concern'd, it will not be a *virtuous* action; nay it may be done from ſuch principles, and to anſwer ſuch purpoſes, as are evil and ſinful, and then, taken *in all its circumſtances*, it will be a *wicked* action; and the more ſo, becauſe it is abuſing an action that is good in itſelf to ſerve ſo vile an end. On the contrary, if a ſincerely religious man does an action which is in itſelf *evil* with a good deſign, and eſpecially, if through *miſtake* he thinks it his duty, the honeſt intention may be perhaps in ſome degree his excuſe; but how far it may be pleaded muſt be left to the deciſion of the ſupreme and righteous judge of the world, who alone knows what *negligence* or criminal *prejudice* was the occaſion of the erroneous judgment of his mind, and conſequently, how far his preſent ill conduct, tho' purſu'd with *upright* views, is owing to a preceding *wrong choice*. And, SERM. XIV.

SERM. XIV. Since it ſo plainly appears that religion, as it is the means of procuring for us acceptance with God, muſt be a *voluntary* thing, it neceſſarily follows that every man has an undoubted right *to judge for himſelf*, what form or method of religion is moſt rational, and agreeable to the divine will. For how can his religion be the reſult of his *free choice*, if he be not allow'd to *chooſe* for himſelf *at all*, in matters of religion; nay if it be not left abſolutely to his own determination? *Reſtrain* this liberty, and you *deſtroy* it. There is no doing the matter by *halves*; but a man muſt either judge *entirely* for himſelf, or *another* muſt judge entirely for him: There is no *medium*. The former of theſe is the true ſtate of the caſe, as has been already ſhewn; and it is evident farther from this conſideration, that every man is, in his own frame and conſtitution, a *moral* agent, and an *accountable* being, and conſequently muſt be left to think and act, as his own *private judgment* directs. His choice muſt be *uncontroul'd*; and no power upon earth has a right to compel him

even to a profeſſion of the *true* reli-SERM. XIV.
gion.

Whether the civil magiſtrate has a right to puniſh *Atheiſts*, and ſuch as deny the obligations of all religion, natural and reveal'd, as long as they behave like good ſubjects, and peaceable uſeful members of ſociety, may be juſtly queſtioned. This enquiry, however, is not to our preſent purpoſe, my buſineſs at this time being only to prove, that he ought to leave every man to the quiet profeſſion of that religion, which his own judgment and conſcience approve, and not to uſe *forcible* methods to bring any to the acknowledgment of the *eſtabliſh'd* religion. And if what I am now arguing againſt be a part of the authority of the chief magiſtrate as *ſuch*, it muſt belong to the ſupreme power of all nations *equally*; and conſequently it muſt be the office of the magiſtrate to propagate, by force, *heathen idolatry* in heathen countries, the *Mahometan ſuperſtition* in Mahometan countries, as well as *Chriſtianity* in Chriſtian countries; *i. e.* ſince this power eſſentially belongs to his office, it muſt be his duty to eſtabliſh by violence both the

SERM. XIV. *true*, and *falſe* religions; or, in other words, to do things which are *contradictory*, and *repugnant* to each other. To ſay that he has only authority to compel men to embrace the *true* religion will make no real difference in the caſe; for if we will not entirely deſtroy his *coercive juriſdiction*, that can be nothing elſe than what the civil magiſtrate, in every particular country, *thinks* to be *true*. And where there are ſeveral powers, all *equal* and *independent*, who claim to be the patrons and defenders of the *true* religion, which, in fact, deſerves that character, can only be determin'd either by a ſerious free and impartial examination of the *pretenſions* of *each* (a thing not to be expected in the preſent caſe, ſince it is this very liberty that is ſuppos'd to be *reſtrain'd*) or by an *immediate revelation* from heaven.

Again, the uſe of force can be of no ſervice to true religion, becauſe it cannot convince the judgment, nor conſequently make *real converts* to it; but has a tendency to encreaſe *fraud* and *hypocriſy*, which is utterly inconſiſtent with reli-

religion. Such a method is likewiſe highly diſhonourable to *truth*, as it puts it upon the ſame foot with *falſhood* and *impoſture*. And, SERM. XIV.

Finally, the office of the magiſtrate is to defend the properties and civil immunities of the ſubject, and to ſecure and promote the public good; and therefore he muſt be bound to reſtrain and puniſh thoſe vices, which are a violation of mens natural rights, deſtructive of the order and happineſs of ſociety, and tending to public confuſion and ruin. But what buſineſs can he have to meddle *beyond* this? Or to enquire into the ſpeculative *opinions* of thoſe, who behave in an honeſt inoffenſive manner, and contribute their part to the general good? Into opinions that are not *detrimental* to the *peace* of the community? For 'tis the *ungovern'd paſſion*, the *bitterneſs* and *contention* which attend religious controverſies, that do all the miſchief, and not *mere difference* of opinion. And I am perſuaded, had the civil power intereſted itſelf leſs in mens *religious* enquiries and diſputes, the world would

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have been much more *peaceable* than it has been; and we ſhould not have had ſo many *unintelligible abſurd* and *extravagant* doctrines claiming to be parts of true religion, nor conſequently ſo much *infidelity*; nor I believe ſo great a variety of ſentiments, as have abounded, eſpecially, in the Chriſtian world. For a rational and free enquiry is much more likely to produce *uniformity* of opinion amongſt ſober and conſiderate men, than impoſition and violence. So that upon theſe accounts it appears, that religion, which is a *perſonal* thing, and entirely a *voluntary* obligation, ought to be left *free* to every man's reaſon; and that the civil magiſtrate, inſtead of *reſtraining* the liberty of private judgment is bound to *protect* all his ſubjects in it, as much as in any other of their *natural rights*, againſt all encroachments whatſoever.

Let me add, before I conclude this head, that as it follows, from religion's being a matter of *choice*, that every man has a right to judge for himſelf which is the *true* religion, and the moſt acceptable method of ſerving God; ſo likewiſe, that

that he ought to use all those means, which the providence of God hath put in his power, in order to make a *right* choice. For *choice*, or giving the *preference*, supposes that that which is the object of it is the *best* of the kind; but how can men judge what religion is *best*, or consequently make a *rational* and *deliberate* choice of it, if they are not *impartial* and *diligent* in their enquiries? Of this I shall have occasion to say something more under the next observation; to which I now proceed. SERM. XIV.

2*dly*, We may infer from the text, that no man can be oblig'd to embrace a religion that is *evil*, i. e. contrary to reason, and the moral fitness of things; but, on the contrary, is bound to reject it. *If*, says *Joshua* to the *Israelites*, *it seem evil unto you to serve the* LORD, *choose ye this day whom ye will serve*; by which he plainly intimated, that if the religion, which the God of *Israel* enjoin'd, had been really *evil*, i. e. unfit, and unreasonable; it would not only have been *lawful*, but their *duty*, to have look'd out for some better scheme. And indeed the

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the thing is ſo clear in itſelf, that I need not ſay much to illuſtrate and confirm it. I ſhall do it therefore, briefly, by an inſtance or two.

If any ſcheme of religion undermines the perfections of God, which the reaſon of our minds can demonſtrate from certain principles, it cannot be *true*. For example, if it repreſents him as an *arbitrary* being, who acts without regard to the reaſon of things, not only in the diſtributions of his bounty, but in his government of moral agents; as an *unjuſt tyrannical* being, who has clogg'd the happineſs of mankind with inſuperable difficulties, and made it depend either upon their *believing* or *doing* impoſſibilities; or as an *angry revengeful* being, who delights in cruelty, and in the miſery and deſtruction of his creatures. And the ſame may be ſaid of any other deſcriptions of the Deity that derogate from his *abſolute perfection*, which is the neceſſary foundation of all true religion. Again, that ſcheme of religion muſt neceſſarily be *falſe*, and ought to be rejected with *deteſtation*, which *diſſolves* or *weakens* the obligations

obligations to univerſal purity, and tends to licentiouſneſs and vice; which indulges to ſenſuality, cenſoriouſneſs, revenge, and encourages violence, perſecution, *&c*; becauſe virtue is of eternal and unchangeable obligation, and the above-mention'd and all other vices are unſuitable to human nature, and the eſtabliſhed order of things; and finally, ſuch an evil ſcheme ought to be abhorr'd, becauſe it is deſtructive of the moral rectitude and happineſs of mankind, which it muſt be the deſign of all true religion to ſupport and advance, and in which the perfections of the Deity are moſt glorioufly diſplay'd. And the allowing that it is mens duty to reject any pretended revelation, that contradicts the principles of natural religion and morality, can be no prejudice to the cauſe of *Chriſtianity*, nor hinder its being acknowledg'd and reverenc'd by conſiderate and impartial minds. If it could, I own that this would be an *inſuperable objection* againſt the Chriſtian inſtitution. But its doctrines are perfectly conſiſtent and rational, and its precepts moſt wiſe, juſt, and good.

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It gives us the nobleſt ideas of God, recommends the moſt ſtrict and univerſal virtue, and enforces the practice of it by the worthieſt and ſtrongeſt motives; and is excellently adapted to promote private perfection and happineſs, and the order, peace, and well being of ſocieties. It will therefore ſtand the teſt of the exacteſt judgment, and bear the moſt *ſevere* and *critical*, provided it be likewiſe an *honeſt* and *impartial* examination. Nay, the more thoroughly it is conſider'd and enquir'd into by the light of uncorrupted reaſon, the more its morals are compar'd with the moſt perfect ſyſtems of *philoſophy*, or with the morals of other *real*, or *pretended* revelations; the more will it ſhine and be diſtinguiſh'd for its excellence, as an inſtitution of all others moſt perfective of true goodneſs, moſt worthy of God, and uſeful to mankind.

It can't be thought after this, that, by what has been ſaid, I intend to inſinuate that all religions are *equal*, and that 'tis indifferent whether a man chooſes the *true* religion or a *falſe* one: For our ſentiments of things, or giving the preference

ference to one thing above another, will not alter their *real nature.* Truth will ſtill be truth, and falſhood falſhood, whatever mens judgments and determinations are. The true religion will be worthy to be *receiv'd*, tho' it ſhould happen to be *univerſally rejected*; and an evil ſcheme of religion to be *rejected*, tho' it ſhould be *univerſally receiv'd.* And tho' religion muſt be a *voluntary* thing, and a matter of *choice*; it is however our duty, in order to the making this choice, to be *diligent* and *impartial* in our enquiries. For the great author of our nature hath endued it with ſuch faculties, as are *proper* to diſtinguiſh betwixt truth and error, and appear to have been given us for this very purpoſe. There is alſo a fix'd and certain *ſtandard* of truth in the reaſon of things, which, in all caſes of importance, and neceſſary influence upon our happineſs, is ſufficiently clear and explicit to *well-diſpos'd* minds. If therefore we indulge to a lazy indolence, and ſuffer our *judgment*, and conſequently our *choice*, thro' prejudice and vitious affections to be abuſed and perverted, we

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are juſtly liable to blame and puniſhment. And again, tho' we may with ſafety reject a religion that is unreaſonable, that patronizes vice, and is diſhonourable to Almighty God; yet it muſt be allow'd, that in order to our being able to judge whether it deſerves that character or no, we muſt *carefully* and *calmly* examine it. And, conſequently, if for want of due enquiry, occaſion'd by a prejudice in favour of our vices, by a regard to worldly intereſt, or by any other evil principle, we reject the true religion under the notion of falſhood, our *believing* that we *may* and *ought* thus to reject it will not excuſe us. For ſo far as our not knowing our duty is *voluntary*, and ſprings from the *non-improvement* of thoſe capacities and advantages for better information, which God, in his providence, has conferr'd upon us; ſo far as it ariſes from the want of an *honeſt unprejudiced* mind, and of exerciſing that *care* and *diligence* in our enquiries, which may juſtly be expected from *rational* and *moral* agents; ſo far as our not ſeeing what it *becomes* us to ſee is not owing to a *weak* and *inſufficient* light,

light, but to *liſtleſsneſs* and *indifference*, and the influence of *ungovern'd appetites*; we are, in the ſight of God, chargeable with *wickedneſs* and *inſincerity*, and, conſequently, liable to the effects of his diſpleaſure. SERM. XIV.

3*dly*, We ſhould learn, from *Joſhua*'s example, to be faithful to the cauſe of God, and the intereſt of religion and virtue, even in times of moſt *general* corruption and depravity. He bravely reſolv'd to adhere to the worſhip of the true God, tho' the whole body of the *Iſraelites* ſhould revolt to Idolatry; *as for me and my houſe, we will ſerve the* LORD. And the ſame ought to be the conduct of every reaſonable man, *viz. inflexibly* to purſue what he is convinc'd to be his duty, whatever the practice of *others* may be, and whatever they may *think*, or *ſay* of him. Singularity, in things indifferent, may generally perhaps be an argument of *weakneſs* and *folly*, or of unbecoming *ſtiffneſs* and *obſtinacy*; but men have carried the argument much too far, when they have paid ſo great a compliment to *cuſtom*, as to urge it againſt the practice of *virtue itſelf*. For the

SERM. XIV. the obligations of virtue are upon no conſiderations whatſoever to be diſpens'd with, much leſs for a piece of *fooliſh fawning complaiſance*; and a man of reaſon would never conſent to do a thing that was *really* diſhonourable, for the ſake of avoiding *undeſerv'd* reproach.

Indeed if virtue and vice were merely *arbitrary*, and had no difference in the nature of things, 'twould be unreaſonable to be *ſingular* in what is now call'd virtue, when what is call'd vice came in *faſhion*, and had the *character* and *reputation* of virtue: Nay farther, one would comply in things *lawful*, with the general prevailing humour of mankind, rather than look *odd* and *particular*, tho it was ſomewhat contrary to one's own inclination. But what man in his ſenſes would conſent to corrupt and diſhonour his nature, and make himſelf miſerable, only becauſe others did the like? Is a mortal diſtemper the leſs cautiouſly avoided becauſe 'tis *epidemical?* Are not the obligations we are under to the great author of our being, to the law of our reaſonable nature, and to preſerve our integrity,

of

of the *firſt* importance? Does not the *rectitude* and *happineſs* of the moral world neceſſarily depend upon fulfilling thoſe obligations? And is it not then our wiſdom to be inflexible in this cauſe, tho' all men ſhould *deſert* and *reproach* us? Or ſhall we ſacrifice this, which is the higheſt intereſt of human nature, to the paſſions, prejudices, and wickedneſs of an *unthinking*, *deluded*, and *degenerate* world? SERM. XIV.

Again, to dare to be *ſingularly good* is an argument of great reſolution and ſtrength of mind, and of a confirm'd and eſtabliſh'd virtue: For ſuch muſt that virtue be, which repels the contagion of *ill examples*, and flags not at *reproaches* and *ill treatment*. And I doubt not, but ſuch a character appears *brave* and *heroic* in the hiſtory of *Joſhua*, or of any other perſons in *former* ages, even to thoſe, who, in very corrupt times, are induc'd by the force of cuſtom, or to juſtify their own practice, to cenſure and exclaim againſt it as preciſe and enthuſiaſtical: which ſhews, that their objection is not ſo much againſt the *thing itſelf*, as againſt the *odium* and *ſcandal* that may attend it.

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But ſurely we may be ſufficiently fortified in this reſpect by conſidering, that while we thus conduct ourſelves, we act ſuitably to the dignity of our reaſonable frame, and conform to the example of the ſupreme being, whoſe goodneſs is *conſtant* and *invariable*; and that ſuch a *ſteddy integrity* will render us approv'd of by this moſt excellent being, and be recompens'd, hereafter, with everlaſting honour and happineſs.

I ſhall conclude all with obſerving, that the deſign of *Joſhua*, to uſe his utmoſt credit and influence with his more *immediate dependants*, for the ſupport and maintenance of *religion*, was truly *noble* and *generous*; and what it will be highly for the *honour* of every one of us to imitate. For it won't bear a ſerious diſpute, which is the moſt *amiable* character, which the moſt *uſeful* member of ſociety, which the *beſt* parent, and head of a family; he that endeavours to inſtruct thoſe under his care in *juſt* and *worthy* notions of God, and leads 'em on to virtue by an *exemplary* behaviour; or another, with the ſame natural accompliſhments,

pliſhments, or acquir'd excellencies, and of the ſame rank and ſituation in the world, who leaves his children and ſervants to the *full ſwing* of their licentious appetites, is not at all concern'd about cultivating and improving in their minds ſentiments of *piety*, and a regard to *good morals*, or, which is much worſe, firſt *debauches*, and then *hardens* them in wickedneſs, by his own *irregular* life.

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SERMON XV.

The evidence of a future ſtate, on the principles of reaſon and revelation, diſtinctly conſidered.

2 TIM. i. 10.

——*Who hath aboliſhed death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the goſpel.*

IT is obſervable in almoſt all controverſies, whether of greater or leſſer importance, that both ſides are apt to run into extremes, in the heat of their oppoſition to each other. Men are ſeldom in-

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clin'd to conſider the principles of their adverſaries as of a *mixt* nature, partly right and partly wrong (which yet is very often the caſe) but ſeem rather to think, that they ought to keep at the greateſt *diſtance* from them that is poſſible, and that all *conceſſions* are diſhonourable, and a betraying the cauſe of truth. I might illuſtrate this by a variety of inſtances, but it will be more to my preſent purpoſe to confine myſelf to one of the moſt conſiderable, and that is, the grand diſpute about the powers of *reaſon*, and the advantages and uſes of *revelation*.

On the one hand reaſon is magnify'd as a plain, diſtinct, and ſufficient rule in *all* circumſtances; and a particular external revelation, to fix and explain the principles and obligations of morality, is repreſented as abſolutely *needleſs*, and, conſequently, unbecoming the infinite wiſdom of God, who can do nothing *in vain*. On the other, revelation is not only deſcrib'd as expedient and uſeful in *certain* circumſtances, but ſtrictly *neceſſary*; and reaſon as a blind erroneous guide,

guide, that is incapable *in itſelf* to direct mankind to the true knowledge of God, or give them juſt notions of their duty and happineſs. Again, the advocates for the *ſtrength* and *perfection* of natural reaſon are apt to talk of it, not only as affording clear and ſtrong evidence of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments *in general*, but even of a ſtate of *immortality*; and that, therefore, we have very little, if any, advantage from *revelation*, with reſpect to this great and important article, beyond what we may receive from that *original light*, which is implanted in every man's mind. On the contrary, ſome defenders of revelation imagine, that nothing of this can be allow'd without diminiſhing its authority and excellence; and that reaſon is not only dark and confus'd with reſpect to the ſoul's *immortality*, but gives no probability of *any future ſtate*. Both theſe, in my judgment, carry the matter *beyond* the truth; and would, perhaps, have fix'd in ſome *middle* opinion, if their thoughts had been intirely *diſintereſted*, and they had not had in view the maintaining and ſupporting

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a *particular ſcheme.* For let reaſon be, *in itſelf*, and if *rightly exercis'd*, ever ſo ſufficient to inſtruct mankind in religion and good morals, a revelation will be nevertheleſs deſireable and beneficial, when it is actually *corrupted* and *darkned*, and the world is overrun with ignorance and ſuperſtition. In like manner, it can be of no poſſible diſſervice to the cauſe of Chriſtianity, to ſuppoſe that *reaſon* might have diſcover'd a future ſtate, any more than to allow that it has reviv'd the knowledge of other *natural* truths, which, tho' founded in reaſon, and capable of being known by it, were, however, in a great meaſure *obliterated* and *loſt*. Beſides it is generally thought, in moſt other caſes, to be one of the chief excellencies of revelation, that its moſt eſſential and important doctrines are agreeable to what the *light of reaſon itſelf* teaches. And ſhall the *ſame* thing be deem'd a diſparagement to it in this particular inſtance? Let the belief of a future ſtate be a dictate of *nature*, revelation will be ſtill highly ſerviceable to mankind, by removing all *uncertainty* and *confuſion* in their

their reaſonings about it, and rectifying *weak* and *ſuperſtitious* notions, diſhonourable to God, and hurtful to ſolid virtue; by greatly increaſing, and adding to the probability *of a future exiſtence in general*, and giving particular aſſurances of a happy *immortality*, which to reaſon is obſcure and doubtful at beſt, if at all probable. I ſhall only add, that by denying there is any foundation in reaſon for the belief of a future ſtate, we take away, from thoſe who diſown revelation, one of the ſtrongeſt motives to a virtuous practice; which is, indeed, no direct proof that the principle itſelf is *wrong*, but may juſtly incline us to *ſuſpect* it; or, at leaſt, ſhould make us proceed with *deliberation* and *caution*, before we venture to determine in a matter of ſo great conſequence, and not ſuffer us to be *haſty* in forming a concluſion, that may be dangerous to religion, and the happineſs of the world. To ſet this matter in a clear and full light, I ſhall do theſe two things.

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I. Con-

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I. Conſider what evidence *natural reaſon* affords of a future ſtate. And,

II. Shew the great advantage we receive from *Chriſtianity*, with reſpect to this important principle; by which it will appear, that notwithſtanding the diſcoveries which reaſon may make, and the intimations we find of it in the writings of the *Old Teſtament*, it is reveal'd in a ſo much *plainer* and *ſtronger* manner, that it may, with great propriety, be ſaid to be *brought to light through the Goſpel.*

I. I am to conſider what kind of evidences there are of a future ſtate from *reaſon.* And, in general, we can pretend to nothing more than *probability*; and when this is all that the nature of the caſe will admit of, every thinking man will be determin'd by it in *religion* as well as in the *common affairs* of life; and it muſt be unreaſonable, to the laſt degree, to inſiſt on *demonſtration* and *ſtrict certainty.* The next point to be ſettled is, what muſt paſs for *probability*; which is the

more neceſſary to be conſidered, becauſe men's not fixing the true nature of it, and blending proofs of a different kind, partly *probable* and partly *demonſtrative*, even where *demonſtration* can't juſtly be expected, ſeems to have occaſion'd all the obſcurity and confuſion in their ſpeculations on this ſubject. SERM. XV.

The chief ground of all our arguings for a future ſtate are the *moral* perfections of God; and theſe are generally ſuppos'd to be *certain* principles, that reaſon can demonſtrate. Now if this be allow'd, I am not at all oblig'd, when I am only forming a *probable* concluſion, to ſhew that any particular principle is *neceſſarily inferr'd* from theſe perfections, becauſe then it will not be barely *probable*, but *certainly true*; nor that the contrary is *abſolutely inconſiſtent* with them, for if ſo, it will not be *probably*, but *certainly* falſe. All that I am concern'd to prove is, that what I maintain is *moſt agreeable* to the ideas of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs; and this muſt be allow'd to be *probable* evidence, tho' I can't reduce the other opinion to a *direct abſurdity*,

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dity, or elſe *probability* will be the ſame with *demonſtration*. Again, in our reaſonings about probability, we muſt judge upon what *appears* to us, and not ſuſpend our belief becauſe we don't know *all the circumſtances* of things, or *all the ends* that an infinitely perfect being may have in view. For *probabilities* ſubſiſt in their full force, and will influence the conduct of every wiſe and conſiderate man, notwithſtanding *poſſibilities* to the contrary. And there muſt be allow'd to be a great probability in the argument before us, if the notion of a future ſtate be ſhewn to be moſt agreeable to the *conſtitution* of man, to the *moral attributes* of God his ſupreme governour, and the *preſent condition* and *circumſtances* of human nature. This I ſhall briefly examine. And,

1*ſt*. If we conſider the nature of mankind, we ſhall find that they are *reaſonable* beings, capable of diſcerning the difference between good and evil, of underſtanding that particular law, whatever it be, by which they are to be govern'd, and the weight and importance of the ſeveral motives which urge

to the obſervation of it; that they are likewiſe *voluntary* agents, who are neither by their internal frame, nor by any foreign influence, neceſſarily determin'd to virtue or vice; and conſequently *moral* and *accountable*, capable of being *govern'd* by laws, and *rewarded* or *puniſh'd* for their behaviour. SERM. XV.

The next thing to be conſider'd then is, whether God, their ſupreme governor, has actually given them *a law*, by which to direct and regulate their conduct. And, in general, it is highly probable that there muſt be ſome law of *intelligent* natures, as there are in the *animal* and *material* world. For doubtleſs the great creator deſign'd them for ſome *end*, as he did, evidently, the various ſyſtems of inſenſible matter; otherwiſe, the moſt perfect parts of the creation are the moſt uſeleſs and inſignificant. Now no creature can anſwer an *end* but by *means* adapted to it, which are the *law* of its nature. So that ſome *peculiar laws* are as neceſſary to be ſuppos'd for *rational ſelf-determining* beings, as the *laws of motion* in the *material* world. And the difference

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ference only lies here, that whereas matter is govern'd by *neceſſary* laws, and *neceſſarily* determin'd to its effects; rational and free beings are capable of directing their own conduct, either in *conformity*, or *oppoſition*, to the law of their nature; which (as I obſerv'd before) renders them *accountable* for their behaviour, and proper ſubjects of *reward* or *puniſhment*.

The general law which men are under is in ſhort this, to do whatever is ſuitable to their *intelligent nature*, agreeable to the *relations* in which they are plac'd, and to their *rank* and *ſtation* in the world, and what will beſt anſwer the *end* of their being, ſo far as it reſpects *themſelves*, or *the whole community of mankind* of which they are members; and, conſequently, to ſubject all the inferior appetites and paſſions to the conduct of reaſon, which is the *nobleſt* and moſt *perfect* principle, to do nothing but what *becomes* the *dignity* of their frame, nothing that will *diſhonour* and *debaſe* it, to practiſe *reverence*, *love*, *ſubmiſſion*, and *gratitude* to God, and imitate his moral character by the

the exerciſe of *juſtice*, *meekneſs*, *peaceable-* SERM.
neſs, *univerſal benevolence*, *fidelity*, and all XV.
other *ſocial* virtues, on which the order
and happineſs of the world depends. And
this I call a law which God has given to
mankind, becauſe whatever appears to be
a rule, ariſing from the eſtabliſhed con-
ſtitution of things, with reference to the
actions of the creature, can be no other
than *a law* in the deſign of the creator.
Let us now proceed to inquire in the

2*d* place, Whether it be not moſt rea-
ſonable to ſuppoſe, that God, as the *wiſe*
governour of mankind, will reward or pu-
niſh their behaviour, in obeying or diſ-
obeying the law of their trial. And, in
general, to imagine that he takes *no notice*
of the conduct of his creatures, and is
determin'd to make *no difference* at all be-
tween the virtuous and the vitious, repre-
ſents him as having but little regard to
the *order* and *harmony*, or even to the *hap-*
pineſs of the rational world; and ſeems
very *unſuitable* to his wiſdom and good-
neſs, in the character both of their *fa-*
ther and *governour*. And if he makes *any*
difference, which all our notions of him
lead

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lead us to expect, the ſame reaſons muſt induce him to do it in *every* inſtance. For if it be not fit to reward virtue and puniſh vice in *particulars*, and conſequently, proportionably, in *every particular*, it can hardly be a point of wiſdom and goodneſs upon *the whole*. And from hence it undeniably follows, that no virtuous man can, upon the whole, have *leſs happineſs* than one that is vitious; for in this caſe, virtue would, in effect, be *puniſh'd*, and vice *rewarded*.

But to give this argument its full ſtrength, it may be proper briefly to ſtate the *true foundation* of the divine rewards and puniſhments. The rewards, beſtowed by the great Creator on his creatures, are not the reſult of any proper *merit* in them; nor his puniſhments the effect of *paſſion* in himſelf. Puniſhments I therefore ſuppoſe to have, chiefly, a *medicinal* deſign, in order to correct the diſorders of mankind, and to have their foundation in the *wiſdom* of the great governour of the world, becauſe they are proper to check the growth of vice, and maintain the authority of the divine laws and government;

ment; and rewards to be founded in his *wiſdom* and *infinite benevolence* towards his creatures, which inclines him to communicate happineſs to all, who are *rightly* diſpos'd and qualify'd for it. The ſum of the argument then will ſtand thus. The deſign of God, in all his dealings with men, is to promote their *happineſs*. He has given them laws, the obſervation of which has not only a *certain* tendency to their happineſs, but is *neceſſary* in order to it—. It is therefore reaſonable to be ſuppos'd, that he will take the moſt effectual methods to ſecure the *general purpoſe* he has in view, which is the *good* of his creatures. — This can't be obtained without *a conformity* to the laws which he has given them. — Theſe laws will not *probably* be obey'd, unleſs they are inforc'd by the ſanction of *ſuitable rewards* and *puniſhments*.——And therefore the wiſdom of his government ſeems to require that he ſhould make uſe of theſe, ſince they are the *moſt proper* means to anſwer his end. So that *rewards* and *puniſhments* appear to have the ſame reaſon and foundation with *government itſelf*,

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viz. to prevent that *moral evil*, which all good laws are deſign'd to reſtrain, and which is directly *oppoſite* to, and *inconſiſtent* with, the ſupreme happineſs of mankind. To this let me add, that in order to ſerve theſe wiſe purpoſes, the rewards and puniſhments muſt be ſuch, as, it may reaſonably be expected, will *ſupport* virtue in the preſent imperfect and corrupt ſtate of human nature, and *counterballance*, in ſome proportion, the influence of animal paſſions, and the weight of worldly temptations. The only point therefore that remains to be determin'd is,

3*dly*, Whether all this, which, it has been ſhewn, may juſtly be expected from the wiſe governour of the world, is actually done *in the preſent life*. And the contrary is in a manner ſelf-evident, and ſcarce needs illuſtration. For not to mention what is obvious to the common ſenſe of mankind, that there are, and have been in all ages, multitudes of *virtuous* perſons, who have enjoy'd leſs happineſs in this life than *the moſt vitious*, whoſe wickedneſs has not only deprav'd their own minds, but

but been extremely injurious to the order and peace of ſociety (which if there be a foundation for the rewards and puniſhments at all, as has been already prov'd, ought not to happen in *any one* inſtance) not to inſiſt longer on this I ſay, if we take the preſent ſtate of the world as it is upon *the whole*, it has not *one mark* of a ſtate of equal and impartial *retribution*, but every thing that might fairly be expected in a ſtate of *trial*. SERM. XV.

For here good and evil are *indifferently* diſpens'd; and there is *one event* to the juſt and the unjuſt, without any *particular*, or, at leaſt, *frequent* interpoſition, to vindicate the righteous man's cauſe, or puniſh his wicked oppreſſor. Men of *diſtinguiſh'd vice* are high in honour, and poſſeſs the largeſt affluence of worldly riches and grandeur, and attain it, oftentimes, by *treachery*, *oppreſſion*, *perjury*, and other *baſe* and *unrighteous* methods; while perſons of *ſingular* and *unblemiſh'd* virtue are loaded with a heavy weight of cares, and abandon'd to poverty and contempt. Nay they are ſometimes deſpis'd, robb'd of the eſteem of their fellow creatures, de-

SERM. XV. priv'd of the neceſſaries and conveniencies of life, abus'd and perſecuted, even for their *goodneſs*.——And do theſe righteous men ſeem to have receiv'd their *reward?*——That reward, which is reſerv'd for them by a God of *infinite benevolence* and *mercy*.——Or that reward, which the *allwiſe* governour of the world is determin'd to confer, for the *encouragement* and *ſupport* of virtue?——On the contrary, can we ſuppoſe the affluence of proſperity, the height of honour, the eaſe and plenty which the wicked enjoy, are deſign'd as *penal evils*, to deter others from the practice of vice?——Can that be call'd a ſtate of *reward* for virtuous men, which they groan under as an incumbrance, and from which they earneſtly deſire to be inlarg'd into a more free and active life?——Or can it be deem'd a *proper puniſhment* for thoſe, who have no notion of happineſs above it, and therefore center all their hopes and deſires in it?

If it be ſaid, that there is a ſufficient diſtinction made between good and bad men, by the *natural good and evil conſequences*

quences of virtue and vice: I anſwer, that, in innumerable caſes, theſe natural conſequences are *obſtructed*, or *evaded*, and in theſe there is properly *no reward or puniſhment at all.* In others they are far from being *equivalent* to the outward advantages the ſinner enjoys, or the accidental diſadvantages the good man labours under; and in all ſuch inſtances, *virtue* may upon the whole be ſaid to *ſuffer*, and *wickedneſs* to be *triumphant.* And conſidering in how great a degree, the difference that there really is between good and bad men, with reſpect to happineſs and miſery, ſprings from *the belief of a future ſtate*; how frequently it happens, that there is no reward or puniſhment *ſeen*, much leſs a *full* and *equal* retribution; and that the *natural good and evil conſequences* of virtue and vice are neither ſo *remarkable* in themſelves, nor ſo *univerſal*, nor ſo *certain*, as, it may reaſonably be expected, will *ſupport* a *ſteddy* inflexible integrity under diſcouragement and oppreſſion, and *counterballance* the ſtrong allurements of worldly honour and pleaſure; upon all theſe ac- SERM. XV.

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counts, I say, we must either conclude, that there will be a state of more *impartial* retribution hereafter, or else, which I have shewn to be highly improbable, that God does not concern himself to make *any* difference between the righteous and the wicked, or at least not so *universally* or in such a *degree*, as to promote the grand design of rewards and punishments, maintaining and enforcing the practice of virtue, and giving a check to corruption and *moral* disorder *.

We may add, to strengthen the *probability* of a future state from the *wisdom*

* I know but of one thing more, that can invalidate any part of the argument contain'd in this discourse, and that is, that 'tis *unnecessary* to assert a state of rewards for good men after death; because if we allow the future punishment of the wicked, that *alone* will make a *sufficient distinction* between them, and answer all the ends of the divine government.——But to this scheme there seems to be an *insuperable* objection, *viz.* that it supposes the *several* degrees of virtue to be *equally* rewarded, or rather *none* of them rewarded; nay, that those which are most *difficult*, attended with the *fewest* pleasures, and the *greatest* inconveniences, and are, withal, of *extraordinary* service to mankind, receive the *least* reward, *i. e.* in truth, are *discourag'd*, instead of being distinguish'd and honour'd. And whether it be possible to reconcile this to the ideas of *supreme wisdom and goodness*, or indeed to the *common principles of equity*, I leave to the judgment of all impartial inquirers.

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and *goodneſs* of God our ſupreme gover- SERM.
nour, the *moral* and *accountable* nature of XV.
man, the *confuſion* and *diſorder* and *promiſcuous* diſtribution of good and evil in the preſent life, that it agrees, vaſtly better than the contrary ſuppoſition, with our general idea of the *excellency* of human nature, and the *greatneſs* and *extent* of its faculties. For upon taking an impartial ſurvey of human life, under its preſent embarraſsments and difficulties, can we really imagine that it is the *whole* of our being, the *only* ſtate we are deſigned for? Can we reconcile our minds to the thought, that man, who is indu'd with ſuch *noble* powers, and capable of ſuch *vaſt* improvements, was intended by the great Creator to be confined to this *narrow* and *imperfect* ſcene of action? Does it ſeem agreeable to our notions of the infinite goodneſs of the Deity, to ſuppoſe that he was made for no *higher end*, than to ſtruggle and labour, for a ſhort ſpace, under the inconveniencies and miſeries of this uncertain and troubleſome world, and then to loſe his exiſtence. On the contrary, is he not, conſidered in this view, one of the moſt

SERM. XV. *unaccountable* parts of the creation; form'd with larger expectations and proſpects than other animals are capable of, only to *diſquiet* and *torment* him? Does he appear with that *honour* which is ſuitable to his character, as a being poſſeſs'd of ſuch *ſuperior* qualities, and made after the *image of God?* No: but as an *inſignificant diminutive* creature, of very little conſequence in the univerſe; a *myſtery* in the courſe of providence, that it will ever confound and puzzle his reaſon to explain. Whereas, if we ſuppoſe that there is a ſtate of much higher perfection, for which human nature is deſign'd, it will appear like itſelf, truly *great* and *excellent.* And if from the *nature* of things we may, as doubtleſs we may with *ſome* probability, gueſs at the *original ſcheme* of the Creator in forming them; the *active* and *improveable* nature of the mind of man, which is ſo cramp'd and limited in its operations in the *preſent* ſtate, ſpeaks it to be intended for *another life* where its faculties will be enlarged; and it will be employ'd in ſuch exerciſes, and enjoy ſuch pleaſures, as are ſuited to its *importance* and *dignity.* Having laid before you, briefly, ſome of the *natural* evidences

evidences of a future ſtate: I proceed to ſhew,

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2*dly*, The advantages we receive from *Chriſtianity*, with reſpect to this important principle; by which it will appear, that notwithſtanding the diſcoveries *reaſon* may make, and the intimations we find of it in the writings of the *Old Teſtament*, it is reveal'd in a ſo much *plainer* and *ſtronger* manner, that it may, with a great propriety, be ſaid to be *brought to light thro' the goſpel*. Suffer me juſt to premiſe, that the aſſurances, which the Chriſtian religion gives of a future life, are a ſtrong preſumption that our *natural reaſonings* about it are *juſt* and *concluſive*. For as it appears in fact, that God is determined to diſpenſe the rewards and puniſhments of virtue and vice hereafter, we may be aſſured, that this is *moſt agreeable* to the wiſdom, goodneſs, and juſtice of his government; and conſequently all our arguguments for it, from his abſolute perfection, and the conſideration of him as the wiſe and righteous governour of mankind, from the powers of human nature, and the preſent ſcene of things, are hereby

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corroborated and *confirm'd*; and ſhewn not to be the wild ſuggeſtions of *fancy* and *enthuſiaſm*, but the ſober dictates of *right reaſon*. However the advantages we receive by Chriſtianity are ſtill very *conſiderable*, and prove it in this reſpect, as well as others, to be of the greateſt uſe and benefit to mankind. For

1*ſt*, By the Chriſtian revelation we have a much ſtronger probability *of a future ſtate in general*, than we could have by mere unaſſiſted reaſon. The *natural probability* is exactly the ſame, as it would have been if there had been no revelation; and with this is join'd *another proof* of a *different* kind, as *ſtrong* as the evidence we have for the truth of Chriſtianity. Theſe two proofs are not at all *inconſiſtent*; but the latter removes all the *uncertainty* that might attend the former, and greatly increaſes the evidence upon *the whole*; like two credible teſtimonies to the ſame fact, which *mutually* ſtrengthen and confirm each other. The teſtimony of *one* honeſt and capable witneſs, to the truth of a thing that fell within his own obſervation, may be thought *ſufficient*; but the addition

tion of *one* or *more* witneſſes, of equal capacity and integrity, muſt render the probability more *full* and *unexceptionable.* SERM. XV.

Again, Chriſtianity aſſures us of the *reſurrection* of the body, (diveſted of all groſs and animal principles, and in a ſtate of glory and incorruption) to be a means of pleaſure and happineſs to the mind, which is a point that *reaſon* was abſolutely in the dark about; and has given us *an inſtance in kind*, a glorious and unconteſtable *ſpecimen* of a reſurrection and future life, in the reſurrection of Chriſt. Then it not only eſtabliſhes the *general notion* of a future exiſtence, but aſſerts, in the ſtrongeſt terms, the ſoul's *immortality* and an *eternal* reward for the righteous, concerning which, tho of the utmoſt conſequence to the comfort of mens minds, and the cauſe of virtue, the dictates of reaſon are at beſt *imperfect* and *confus'd.* And tho' the *Jews* were favoured with a revelation from heaven, and therefore among them, one might juſtly expect clearer and fuller diſcoveries of *eternal life*; yet notwithſtanding this, the law of *Moſes* has nothing in it of this kind, but is in-

SERM. XV.

forced only by general aſſurances of the divine favour, and promiſes of *temporal* rewards; and there are very *ſparing* intimations of a future *immortality*, even in the writings of the Prophets.

Add to all this, that the reward, which the Goſpel propoſes, is of the *nobleſt* kind, honourable to God, and worthy the excellent powers and capacities of human nature. It conſiſts, under the continual influence of the divine preſence and favour, in the perfection of *reaſon* and *purity*; is *an inheritance undefiled*, into which nothing of vice or miſery ſhall enter; a ſtate where *charity never faileth*, and, conſequently, of eternal harmony and peace, and the moſt exalted ſocial happineſs; in which the *whole* human nature ſhall ſhine in its higheſt luſtre and dignity, the ſpiritual part being compleatly *refin'd*, and fitted for the *ſublimeſt* imployments and pleaſures, and the body ſo *adapted* to it, that inſtead of *cramping* the rational life, it ſhall rather *aſſiſt* its moſt inlarged operations.

I ſhall conclude all with this ſingle remark, that if there are any here preſent,

ſent, who are prejudic'd againſt the *Chriſ-* SERM.
tian revelation, on account of the clear XV.
diſcoveries it makes of a future ſtate of
rewards and puniſhments, they muſt be
convinc'd, that they can reap but little
advantage by rejecting *Chriſtianity*, be-
cauſe the thing in general, how terrible
ſoever it may appear, is a principle *the
light of reaſon* dictates. Let it be allow'd,
that the evidence for it amounts to no
more than a good degree of *probability*,
it ought however to determine the prac-
tice of every rational man.——For what
but *probability* is the chief ſpring of hu-
man actions? ——Do not *credible* teſti-
mony, probable opinions and proſpects,
nay frequently *ſuſpicions* and *remote* con-
ſequences and conjectures, influence all
the affairs of the world; and direct mens
conduct in caſes of the laſt importance
to *themſelves*, their *families*, and *civil ſoci-
ety*?——It ought, therefore, undoubtedly
to decide in matters of religion, which
is the moſt momentous of all our in-
tereſts: And a man, in the opinion of
every impartial ſpectator, would behave
to the higheſt pitch of extravagance,

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who ſhould act *againſt* probability, as he muſt do if he is not *determin'd* by it, when an eternity of happineſs is depending. So that he who gives himſelf up to the gratification of irregular appetites, and a courſe of vice and impurity, can never be ſecure, even tho' he deſtroys the authority of the *Chriſtian revelation*, unleſs he can alſo extinguiſh his *reaſon*, eraſe out of his mind all notions of a *Deity* and a *Providence*, and, conſequently, ſubvert the principles of *natural religion* likewiſe.

I have argu'd only upon the *ſuppoſition* that there are ſuch perſons, becauſe to take it for *granted* that there are really any, who are acted by this vile principle, and have ſuch a degenerate and monſtrous turn of mind, would be the greateſt *affront* I could offer to this audience. For to ſay that a man is *prejudic'd* againſt what is the trueſt exaltation and happineſs of his nature, is, in effect, to aſſert, that all remains of reaſon, all wiſe and good impreſſions, are totally loſt and obliterated in him. He that can wiſh to die like a *brute*, can't have the *ſpirit* of

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a *man*; and there is no *baſeneſs*, no *vil-* SERM.
lainy, but we may juſtly ſuppoſe him ca- XV.
pable of. Beſides, what do his notions
tend to?——Do they raiſe the *value* of human nature, or improve its *happineſs*?——Do they contribute to the regularity and order of *private life*, or the peace and welfare of *ſociety*?——Will they make him at all more *uſeful* in the world, a more *faithful* friend, *tender* husband, *affectionate* and *careful* father, or more *induſtrious* and *honeſt* in his buſineſs? Quite the reverſe of all this.——They *degrade* and *vilify* human nature;——raiſe none but *gloomy* and *horrid* ideas in a conſiderate mind;——and lead to *licentiouſneſs* and *diſorder*. Let us therefore thankfully cheriſh the glorious hopes, which the goſpel affords, of *an immortal exiſtence*, in which we ſhall enjoy the perfection of honour and happineſs. Let us look on this ſtate only as *preparatory* to our future more ſublime and bliſsful life; and train ourſelves up for it by cultivating our reaſon, and the practice of univerſal righteouſneſs and virtue. I ſhall leave with you, to this purpoſe, the words

of

SERM. XV. of St. *John*, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: But we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

1 John iii. 2.

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

The nature, folly, and danger of ſcoffing at religion.

2 PET. iii. 3.

Knowing this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts.

A Diſcourſe on this ſubject can need no apology with any one that knows the world, and has obſerved what open attempts have been made (and conducted ſometimes with a great deal of art and ſubtilty) not only to diſgrace and undermine *revelation*, but *natural religion* itſelf; and

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SERM. XVI. and propagate ſuch *baſe*, *unworthy*, and *groveling* ſentiments of human nature, as have a direct tendency to root out of mens minds every principle of honour and ingenuity, and deſtroy the very foundation of all good morals. Some there are, even among our ſelves, who endeavour to *palliate* and *ſoften* the vileſt enormities, reſolve the whole obligation of morality into *political contrivance*, and, with the ſcoffers mention'd by St. *Peter*, deride the *future judgment* of mankind, a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after death, as an *idle*, *romantic*, *viſionary* ſcene, invented for the greater ſecurity of civil government, and ſupported by enthuſiaſm; and thus would fain banter us out of the two higheſt privileges of our reaſonable nature, our *virtue* and our *immortality*. I ſpeak not theſe things for the ſake of declaiming on the *looſeneſs* and *degeneracy* of the times, or with a view to repreſent the *preſent* as more corrupt than *former* ages, in almoſt all of which, there have been ſome profeſs'd advocates for vice and licentiouſneſs; but only to ſhew how neceſſary it is, that we ſhould each

each of us, in our ſeveral ſtations, endeavour to put a ſtop to the *progreſs* of this evil, which ſeems rather to be prevailing than loſing ground amongſt us, and has been long complain'd of by all thoſe, who have had a juſt concern for the honour of human nature, and the happineſs of the world. To contribute my part towards it, and not to give *hard names*, or raiſe an abhorrence of any *particular characters*, farther than it is neceſſary to ſerve the cauſe of truth, was my ſincere intention in compoſing this diſcourſe: In which I ſhall SERM. XVI.

I. Conſider the nature, folly, and danger of the crime mentioned in the text.
II. Inquire into the cauſes of it. And,
III. Conclude with ſome ſuitable reflections.

I. I am to conſider the nature, folly, and danger of the crime mentioned in my text, *ſcoffing at religion*, than which nothing can be more offenſive and ſhocking to a conſiderate mind. It muſt in-

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deed be own'd, that religion has had the misfortune to be monſtrouſly *perverted* and *miſrepreſented*, and that the moſt abſurd and incredible doctrines, the wildeſt enthuſiaſm, and even ſuch principles and practices as ſtrike at the root of all morality, have been urg'd and impos'd under that *ſacred* and *venerable* name. And undoubtedly it muſt be a laudable deſign, and of great ſervice to mankind, to expoſe theſe groſs corruptions, by which the *native* excellency and beauty of religion is quite defac'd, and its uſefulneſs intirely deſtroy'd. However, even eſtabliſh'd and popular ſuperſtitions are not to be treated with *rudeneſs* and *ſcurrility*, but *calmly argued* againſt. For there is a decent reſpect due to the *religion* of a country, as well as to its *laws* and *manners*; and he, who inſtead of *reaſoning* againſt particular errors, takes upon him to *revile*, and treat in a *ludicrous* way, what all round him have the higheſt value for, ſhews himſelf to be an abſolute ſtranger to the common rules of civility,——and ought, to be *deſpis'd* for his *inſolence*. Beſides,

religious

religious prejudices are, of all others, the moſt ſtubborn and inveterate; and, therefore, whoever attempts to reform them, if he knows any thing of human nature, will proceed with *diſcretion* and *gentleneſs*; and not in a *harſh inſulting* method, which muſt naturally irritate and inflame the paſſions, and render the prejudices of thoſe whom he oppoſes yet more incurable. And all judicious inquirers will make a difference between religion as it is *in itſelf*, and as it has ſuffer'd by *accidental abuſes*. For the former may, in every part of it, be rational, and highly beneficial, tho' the latter ſhould be allow'd to be abſurd, unnatural, and hurtful; and, by neceſſary conſequence, it may be an argument of a diſcerning mind, and both an honourable and uſeful undertaking, to endeavour to put a ſtop to the growth of *enthuſiaſm* and *ſuperſtition*, but unworthy a man, or a good member of ſociety, to banter *religion*.

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I am inclin'd to treat ſuch ſcoffers *decently*, and ſhall therefore ſuppoſe them capable of ſober reflection. And taking this for granted, I would deſire them to

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ask themſelves impartially, whether there be any thing in true religion that is *really* ridiculous? To begin with the grand principles of natural religion. Is there any thing *ridiculous* in the belief of a Deity, a ſupreme, infinite, and intelligent mind, the creator and governor of the univerſe? Or is it more agreeable to *reaſon* to ſuppoſe, that the whole ſyſtem of the world, which appears in fact to be ſubject to innumerable variations, is eternal and neceſſarily exiſtent? Or that the regular, beautiful, and uſeful frame of nature, in every part of which there is diſplay'd the moſt ſurprizing and curious workmanſhip, was jumbled together by chance, and not form'd by a wiſe cauſe? Is it *abſurd* to aſſert, that he who made the world exerciſes an univerſal providence, and directs all the affairs of it; or that the firſt cauſe of all things is abſolutely perfect, and, in a particular manner, the governor of the rational and moral creation, to whom he has given laws, and whom he has made by nature accountable? And upon allowing his abſolute perfection and government of the world, what

what is there *ludicrous* in any of the duties of piety, in a ſupreme reverence and love of him, and humble ſubmiſſion to the wiſdom and authority of his providence, in celebrating his glorious excellencies, adoring his goodneſs, and acknowledging our conſtant dependance upon him? What is there that has *a ridiculous aſpect*, or can excite any but *the laughter of fools*, in juſtice, temperance, probity, univerſal benevolence; in a ſtrict inflexible integrity, and a diſintereſted generous concern for the public welfare? And if in all theſe moſt eſſential principles and duties of religion there be nothing *wild* and *extravagant*, nothing *weak* and *trifling*, nothing, on the contrary, but what is truly *venerable ſublime* and *uſeful*, he that endeavours to make a jeſt of them muſt render himſelf *contemptible*; and gives certain proof either of the *weakneſs* of his underſtanding, or of the *depravity* and *wickedneſs* of his heart. SERM. XVI.

Again, is it at all *unſuitable* to our moſt worthy and honourable notions of God to believe, that when the world was uni-

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verſally corrupted, and overrun with ignorance, ſuperſtition, and vice, and both the knowledge and practice of the religion of nature were, in a great meaſure, loſt, he would graciouſly interpoſe for the good of his creatures, and teach them their duty by an *extraordinary* revelation? Or to aſſert, that the perſon, who was commiſſion'd to accompliſh this moſt deſireable end, wrought miracles to prove his authority, engage the *attention* of mankind, and counterballance their *prejudices?* Is it in the leaſt *irrational* to ſuppoſe, that this revelation has fix'd, with the utmoſt diſtinctneſs, the terms of our acceptance with God, and thereby remov'd *diſtracting* ſuſpicions, and *ſuperſtitious* terrors; and promis'd a *greater* reward, even an *eternity* of happineſs, a *greater* reward, I ſay, for the incouragement of virtue, than could be expected, with any good degree of probability, on the principles of natural reaſon: Or finally, that beſides *the law of nature reviv'd*, it ſhould enjoin two or three *poſitive* duties (guarding, in the ſtricteſt manner poſſible againſt all *weak* and *dangerous*

dangerous abuſes of them) which are evi- SERM.
dently calculated to enforce the eter- XVI.
nal rules of morality, and a moſt exact
and ſcrupulous regard to every branch of
ſubſtantial and uſeful virtue?

It is poſſible, indeed, by an *unfair repreſentation* to make any thing appear ridiculous, be it ever ſo rational in itſelf, or of ever ſo much importance to the happineſs of mankind. The putting *falſe colours* upon it, nay only the giving it an *odd name*, will have this effect with the thoughtleſs and inconſiderate part of the world. Thus rigid juſtice may be call'd *ſingularity* and *preciſeneſs*;——acts of diſintereſted benevolence and generoſity *romantic heroiſm*;——and the love of God *enthuſiaſm*. In like manner the being *immers'd* in water, or eating bread, or drinking wine,——if it be deſcrib'd as an eſſential part of religion in itſelf, without a reference to its moral uſe,——or as a charm, of I know not what myſterious and incomprehenſible efficacy,--or as an atonement for an immoral conduct,—may well be reputed *weak* and *childiſh*. But when the *abuſe* is diſcovered upon an impartial examination,

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amination, and it is clearly seen, that the ridiculer has only diverted himself and others with his own *ignorance* or *wilful misconstruction*; wise and sober men must think very meanly of such a practice, and be surpriz'd to find it prevail in any companies, that have a concern for their own *honour*, and profess a regard, I need not say to *truth* and *virtue*, but to *common sense* and *decency*.

Further, the grand principles and duties of religion are so far from having any thing *ridiculous* in them, that they are some of the *plainest* and most *obvious* dictates of reason, and there are no truths, that, when justly represented, sooner approve themselves to the unprejudiced judgment of mankind; which renders the *guilt* of the scoffer much more aggravated, and his *impertinence* and *folly* more insupportable. This is notorious with respect to the being and providence of God, and the intrinsic excellency and immutable authority of the rules of virtue, which no one can bring himself in earnest to oppose, without offering great violence to the reason of his mind. And

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as to *Chriſtianity* in particular, ſince it is the nobleſt improvement of morality and natural religion, and *ſo far* recommends itſelf; ſince all its *peculiar* doctrines are conſiſtent and credible; ſince the author of this moſt rational and beneficial ſcheme was a perfect pattern of *innocence*, open, generous, and humble, free from every appearance of *ambition* and *craft*, and gave the moſt convincing proofs of his being ſent from God, by numerous and unqueſtionable miracles; *real* miracles, above the *known* powers of nature or art, nay, probably, above any powers communicated or allow'd to *created* agents; miracles *publicly* perform'd, and on *vaſt multitudes* at once, and on *ſudden emergencies*, where there could be no ſuſpicion of a concerted fraud; and, generally, moſt *uſeful* miracles, which were not mere oſtentations of the ſuperiour power and wiſdom, but demonſtrated likewiſe the goodneſs of their author; upon theſe accounts, I ſay, it may juſtly be aſſerted, with reſpect to the *Chriſtian revelation* in particular, that it deſerves the approbation of impartial inquirers, or at leaſt to be oppos'd with *modeſty* and *reſpect*; and SERM. XVI.

that

SERM. XVI. that to decide againſt it *confidently*, and treat it with *rudeneſs* and *contempt*, notwithſtanding all theſe plauſible circumſtances, and ſtrong preſumptions of it truth and divinity, is *weakneſs* and *inſolence*.

Let me only add, that religion is of the utmoſt conſequence to the comfort of mens minds, the peace of ſociety, and the general good of the world. What, for inſtance, can be a more *pleaſing* reflection, than to conſider ourſelves, and the whole univerſe, as under the conduct of a being of unerring wiſdom, inflexible juſtice, and unlimited goodneſs? On the contrary, if we diſcard the notion of a Deity and a Providence, we can have none but *dark* and *gloomy* proſpect; our happineſs or miſery being to be determined either by a *blind random chance*, or by *fix'd and irrevocable fate*? Again, what can be more *honourable* to human nature, than the notion of a future immortal exiſtence, in which our rational faculties will be refin'd and enlarg'd; or what ſtronger motive to the practice of virtue, which has a neceſſary and inſeperable connexion both with *private*

private and *ſocial* happineſs; or more powerful diſſuaſive from vice, which tends to the corruption and miſery of *individuals*, and the diſſolution and ruin of *public communities?* And if we ſuppoſe that the diſtinction between virtue and vice is only imaginary, and has no foundation in reaſon and nature; has not this a moſt direct tendency to introduce *all manner of confuſion?* Upon this ſcheme ſocieties would be ſo far from being *happy*, that they could *ſcarce ſubſiſt:* For if the exerciſe of the ſocial virtues was regarded as a mere matter of *private convenience*, the greateſt *ſtrength* and *ſecurity* of civil government would be deſtroy'd. So that whoever ſets himſelf to vilify theſe important truths, and repreſent them in a ridiculous light, not only fixes certain *reproach* and *infamy* upon himſelf, by *miſplacing* his ridicule on what has really nothing abſurd in it; he not only ſhews himſelf to be a *ſlight* and *careleſs* obſerver, that never examin'd to the bottom of things; but is, in fact, whatever his intention may be, whether to gratify a *trifling* humour, diſplay the *forwardneſs* of his ge-

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SERM. XVI. nius, or corrupt the *morals* of the age, an enemy to *ſociety* and the *general happineſs* of mankind *.

And as the *guilt* of theſe ſcoffers is very great, their *danger* is in proportion. For if the principles of religion ſhould happen to be *true* (and the *vaineſt* and moſt *confident* unbeliever won't, ſurely, pretend to prove that this is *impoſſible*) he that has ſo *monſtrouſly* abus'd his reaſon, that nobleſt gift of God, as to imploy it againſt his maker, and all that is amiable and uſeful in human life, muſt expect to be treated with the utmoſt *rigour* and *ſeverity*. Having conſider'd, thus largely, the nature, folly, and danger of *ſcoffing* at religion: I proced to the

* I would not be underſtood, by this, to inſinuate, that even ſuch perſons ought to be puniſh'd by the civil power. On the contrary, as *theſe enemies* may be entirely defeated by *reaſon*, and the miſchief they are capable of doing prevented, 'tis my firm belief that *forcible methods* are altogether *unneceſſary*, and muſt, of conſequence, be extremely *dangerous*. For the allowing the magiſtrate to interpoſe in matters of *opinion*, where there is no *direct* violation of the peace of the ſociety, only for fear of *remote* and *poſſible* conſequences (of which he muſt be the ſole and abſolute judge) will lay a foundation for all manner of *violence* and *perſecution*.

2*d* Thing propos'd, which was to inquire into the cauſes of it. Theſe cauſes are *various.* SERM. XVI.

It ſometimes ſprings from a *levity* of mind, which diſpoſes men to treat all ſubjects *ludicrouſly*. Inſtances of this kind muſt have fallen, more or leſs, under every one's obſervation; I mean of perſons, who are incapable of *cool* and *ſedate* reflection, and ſo fond of *a jeſt*, that they can't help giving way to it on the moſt *ſolemn* occaſions. They are profeſs'd enemies to all that is grave and manly, and therefore treat *religion*, as well as their *friends*, and thoſe to whom they are under the higheſt obligations, with the utmoſt *freedom* and *impertinence.*

Again, bantering religion frequently proceeds from *ignorance* and *ſuperficial inquiry.* 'Tis an excellent remark of a moſt ingenious author, that "a *little* "philoſophy diſpoſes mens minds to *A-* "*theiſm.*" * Becauſe they underſtand not the works of nature, their admirable compoſition, and various uſes, they grow

* Lord *Bacon.*

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SERM. XVI.

profane and *ſceptical*; and are apt to urge their own *miſtakes*, ariſing from the ſhallowneſs and confuſion of their underſtandings, as ſo many *defects* and *blemiſhes* in the conſtitution of the univerſe. They have juſt ſenſe enough to *cavil*, but not to *diſcern* and *diſplay* the glories of the creation, and the amazing wiſdom and goodneſs of the creator. And it is for want of a right knowledge of *human nature*, and of the *fitneſs* and *beauty* of actions and characters, that ſo many attempts have been made to confound virtue and vice, and deſtroy the obligations of morality.

But this cauſe of ſcoffing is moſt notorious with reſpect to *reveal'd* religion. The *inconſiſtencies* of party-ſchemes, the *dreams* of bewilder'd enthuſiaſts, the *innovations* and *corruptions* of weak, ſuperſtitious, and deſigning men, are blended with the *original* doctrines of Chriſtianity, in order to render it ridiculous. The *frauds*, *impoſitions*, and *perſecutions* of diſhoneſt, proud, tyrannical prieſts are objected to the very religion that *condemns* them; which, upon this account, is all repreſented as the effect of *prieſtcraft*, combin'd

bin'd with the cunning of *ſtateſmen* and *politicians*, with a view to inſlave and impoveriſh the reſt of mankind. Conſult the writings of the enemies of Chriſtianity, or join in their converſations, and you will find, that the *ſhrewdeſt*, moſt *popular*, and conſtant invectives turn upon ſuch topics as theſe; which evidently proves, that they are not always very *exact* and *careful* in their religious inquiries, that they proceed on *falſe* principles, and cenſure what they have no *juſt idea* of, and are not quite free even from that *prejudice* and *implicit faith*, which they loudly diſclaim for themſelves, but are ſo forward to charge upon others. SERM. XVI.

Sometimes again, it happens, that the *faſhion* of the age they live in, or the *general humour* of the company they frequent, makes perſons ſet up for *ſcoffers*. To give themſelves a *genteel* air, and acquire a character for *politeneſs*, they are induc'd to deride all religion if the genius of their company be ſo *bold* and *unconfin'd*, or if it be more *moderate*, only revelation. At other times the ſame effect may be aſcrib'd to *vanity*. Men are deſirous to *di-*

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ſtinguiſh their names; or fond of diſplaying their *wit*, and talent at *ridicule*. Whereas, in truth, there is no *wit* at all in *miſrepreſenting* things, but rather a ſtrong preſumption of *ignorance* and *ſtupidity*; and when any proceed ſo far, as to make a jeſt of God and his providence, to plead for the priviledge of dying like brutes, and banter the obligations of virtue, which are a law to all intelligent beings, ſuch a conduct is a certain proof, that reaſon is, in a great meaſure, *extinguiſh'd*, and the mind loſt to all *good* and *generous* impreſſions.

But this leads me to obſerve, in the laſt place, that ſcoffing at religion may, in ſome perſons, proceed from a *direct hatred* of it, occaſioned by a prejudice in favour of their vices. This was the caſe of the *ſcoffers* mention'd in the text, who are expreſly deſcrib'd as *walking after their own luſts*. To this, likewiſe, our Saviour imputed the ill treatment he met with, from the principal men of the *Jewiſh* nation. I ſhall not pretend to determine, that it is, *always*, the cauſe of infidelity in the preſent age; becauſe I make no doubt but

but mens judgments may be *unhappily* per- SERM. verted, even in points of great impor- XVI. tance, where there is, in general, an *honeſt* temper and habit of mind. This however I may ſafely venture to aſſert, that vice and immorality in the practice is the ſource of the *ſtouteſt* and moſt *invincible* prejudices againſt religion; and that there is an *immediate connexion* between a wicked irregular life and *hating* the truth, nay, *oppoſing* the truth with the utmoſt *bitterneſs* and *virulence*. Suffer me to purſue this obſervation a little, which is of great conſequence in *morals*, and will ſerve very much to illuſtrate the ſubject before us.

How natural is it for thoſe, who live *as without God in the world*, to *wiſh* that there was no ſuch Being, that by deſtroying the firſt principle of all religion, they may juſtify the want of it in their practice. Or if the proofs of his exiſtence are ſo evident and unconteſtable, as not to be diſputed, much leſs ſuppreſs'd, the next thing they are inclined to believe is, that there is no *providence*; and if they can ſatisfy themſelves in this point, they get

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rid of the troubleſome notion of an *inſpector* and *judge* of their actions, and are left to follow, *freely*, the bent of their licentious inclinations. A principal part of God's providential government, if there be any ſuch thing, is the government of *moral agents*, which, as it ſuppoſes that they are under a *law*, ſuppoſes likewiſe that they are *accountable* beings, and will be *rewarded*, or *puniſh'd*, according to their obedience, or diſobedience to that law; and this future ſtate of *retribution*, we may reaſonably imagine, wicked men can't bear the thought of, becauſe it fills the mind with confuſion and terror, and ſpoils the reliſh of their ſenſual enjoyments; and, of conſequence, they muſt be enemies to the notion of God's *governing providence*, from whence it is ſo directly inferr'd. And farther, when perſons act as if there was no eternal law or rule of *right*, making their irregular appetites the ſole guide and meaſure of their conduct, they are *unavoidably determin'd to wiſh* that virtue and vice were but *empty* names, the invention of the *crafty* and *politic* to keep the world in ſub-

ſubjection, and impoſe on their ignorance and credulity; and that the diſtinction between moral good and evil was merely *arbitrary*, and did not ſpring from the immutable *reaſon* of things. So that a wicked life has a manifeſt tendency to beget a *diſlike* of the great principles of *natural religion*, and inclines the mind to *queſtion* their truth and authority. But becauſe *Chriſtianity* has fully eſtabliſh'd the notion of a providence, and moſt clearly explain'd, confirm'd, and improv'd moral obligations, and declar'd the certainty of future rewards and puniſhments; and as theſe things ſtand in this divine revelation, they are not ſo liable to be *diſputed* and *perplex'd* as mere natural reaſonings; it is no wonder if perſons of corrupt diſpoſitions and ungovern'd appetites take *particular* offence at *that*, ſince ſo long as the truth of our holy religion is unqueſtion'd, they can enjoy no *peace* or *ſecurity* in their vices. SERM. XVI.

I ſhall only add, that when men are *averſe* to the principles of religion, they will naturally *decline* all farther inquiries into the reaſonableneſs of them, and be

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fond of every thing that looks *plauſible* on the ſide of infidelity. And the objections they have gather'd together againſt religion, will ſoon appear to the view of their paſſions and prejudices, which give an *unnatural* turn to all objects, and never repreſent them in their juſt *proportion*, very *great* and *conſiderable*. On the contrary, the arguments for it will loſe all their *force*, and be eſteem'd *weak* and *trifling*. Till, at length, by this monſtrous way of *imagining*, inſtead of *reaſoning*, they work themſelves into a fix'd perſuaſion, that there is nothing at all in religion; and acquire *an habit of thinking* ſomewhat like a *principle*, that there is not in nature any ſolid foundation of virtue. And when they have thus conquer'd their *ſcruples*, or rather ſilenc'd the voice of natural conſcience, ſuppreſs'd their ſenſe of the difference of good and evil, and *perverted* their reaſon, to render it *ſubſervient* and *compliable* to their paſſions, they are eaſily led on to make *violent* and *ſpiteful* attacks upon religion, and uſe their utmoſt cunning and ſophiſtry to undermine it. This is the

deplorable

deplorable but too *evident* connexion be- SERM.
between vicious habits and oppoſing the XVI.
truth; till it ſettles, at laſt, in *rancour*
and *malice* againſt it.

What has been ſaid, in the foregoing diſcourſe, ſuggeſts ſeveral uſeful reflections. We learn from it,

1ſt. Into what *extreme corruption* the mind of man, which is indu'd with ſuch noble faculties and form'd for Godlike perfection, is capable of being ſunk, even to miſtake *confuſion* for *order*, and *deformity* for *beauty*; to have its reaſon imploy'd as an *advocate* for *vice*, to paint it in *agreeable* colours, and ſet off the *ſhame* and *miſery* of human nature with falſe and deluſive charms; and in vilifying *religion*, and repreſenting it as *ridiculous* and *unnatural*; *religion*, which is our chief honour and dignity, the only ſource of inward ſatisfaction, and the baſis and ſupport of ſocial happineſs, and which affords ſuch raviſhing proſpects with reſpect to another life, as muſt make the moſt admir'd and envied ſcenes of worldly glory, pleaſure, and luxury, appear mean and deſpicable.

SERM. XVI. Again, that we may not be impos'd on by the ſcoffers of our own times, let us always take care to diſtinguiſh between *reaſoning* and *ridicule*. There may indeed be *reaſon* in ridicule, but I believe it will generally be found, that there is a greater proportion of *falſehood* and *miſrepreſentation*. When therefore we are attack'd this way, as there is juſt ground for *ſuſpicion*, we ſhould examine nicely what it is that is *really* ridiculous; whether it be religion itſelf, or ſomething of a different nature ſubſtituted in the place of it. The latter of theſe we may be ſatisfy'd will appear to be the caſe; for religion can't ſuffer by being *ſcrutiniz'd* any way, tho' our judgment concerning it may be debauch'd and corrupted. Of this indeed there will be but little danger, while we follow the method above recommended; otherwiſe, we may be banter'd out of our *ſenſes*, and have no ſecurity againſt the moſt *dangerous deluſions*.

Finally, that we may keep at the utmoſt diſtance from the crime mention'd in the text, let us imploy our reaſon in *defending* religion, and repreſenting it in

a *juſt* and *amiable* light. Let our *natural* SERM. *abilities* be devoted to this ſervice, and all XVI. our *ſtudies* and *improvements* made ſubſervient to it. For the underſtanding and wit of man can't be more *ſuitably* or *honourably* exercis'd, than in deſcribing virtue in its proper beauty and luſtre, and ſtripping vice of thoſe artificial ornaments, which hide its natural horror and infamy; than in recommending juſtice, truth, and benevolence, and expoſing the miſchiefs of ungovern'd paſſions; than in tracing the footſteps of God's ſtupendous wiſdom and unbounded goodneſs in the works of creation, the conduct of providence, and the wonderful ſcheme of our redemption. Theſe are ſuch *refin'd* and *exalted* ſpeculations, as muſt always be our *nobleſt* entertainment, while we continue poſſeſs'd of rational faculties. By purſuing this deſign we act in *concert* with the infinite wiſdom of God, and the reaſon of all good ſpirits above us; do the *beſt offices* we are capable of to mankind; and for improving, in ſo worthy a manner, that *great* talent,

SERM. XVI. which is the moſt *diſtinguiſhing* excellency of our nature, ſhall receive peculiar marks of approbation and eſteem from the ſupreme and almighty being, who is the *lover* and *rewarder* of virtue. To him be glory for ever. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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